

NEIGHBORS

*Stories of
Neighborhood House Work
in a Great City*

BY FLORENCE H. TOWNE

Head Resident of Erie Neighborhood House

O city of broad streets,
High skylines, and proud buildings,
Green parks, wide bridges, mighty marts of trade,
These things are not your treasure
On which your permanence shall rest;

Firmer foundations you must build upon
If you would live.

Seek the divinity which dwells in human hearts
(Tho' buried deep)
Save the great wastage on your crowded streets,
And so, you shall endure.

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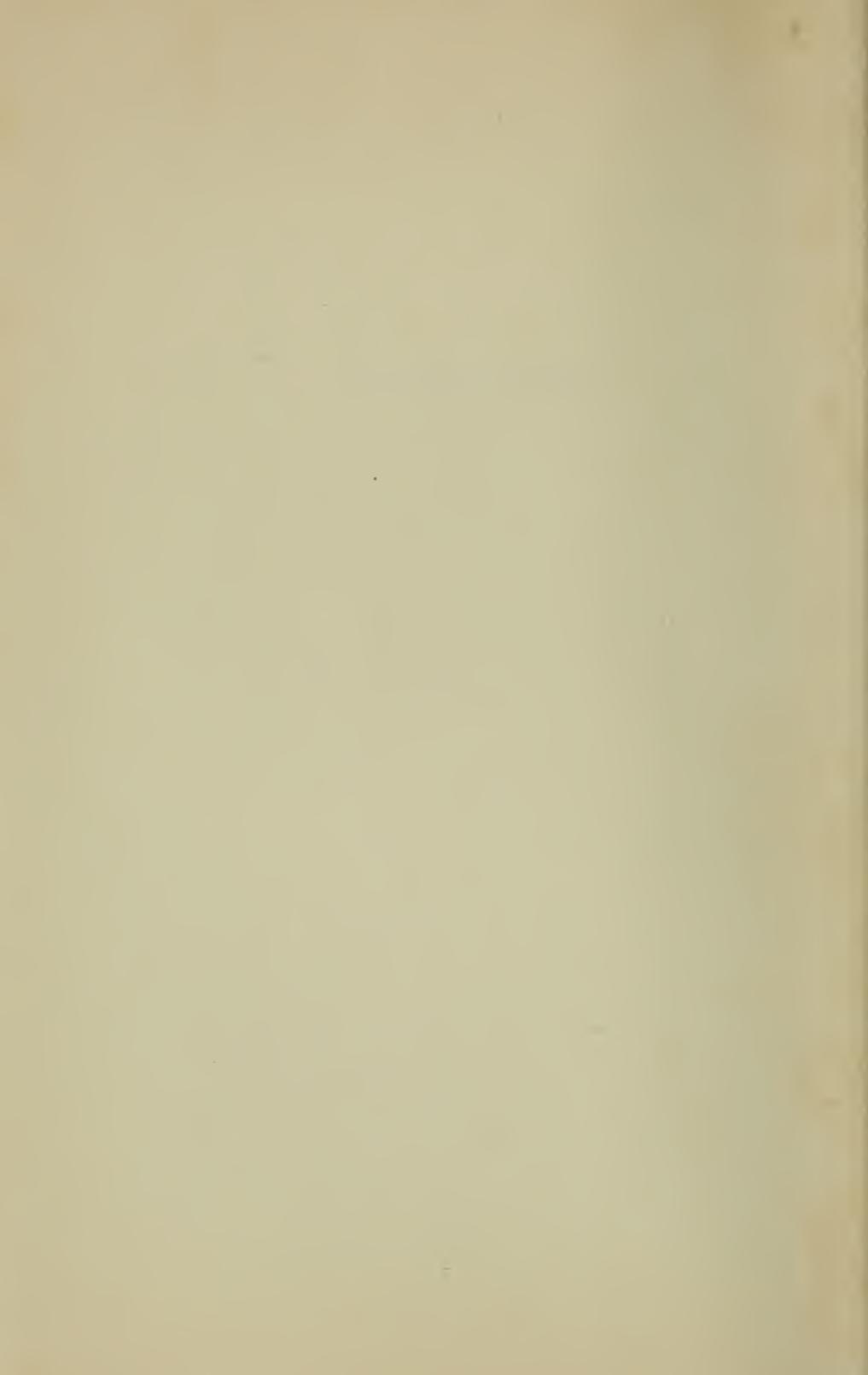
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NEIGHBORS





“Miss Florence”

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*Stories of
Neighborhood House Work
in a Great City*

BY FLORENCE H. TOWNE

HEAD RESIDENT OF
ERIE NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

Published by

The Board of Directors of the
Erie Neighborhood House

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FLORENCE H. TOWNE*

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DEDICATED

TO

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS,

OUR WOMAN'S AUXILIARY

AND ALL OTHER FRIENDS OF

ERIE NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

WHOSE DEVOTED SERVICE AND GIFTS

FOR OUR MAINTENANCE HAVE

BROUGHT FROM DAY TO DAY

*NEW HOPE AND COURAGE AND A NEW WAY
OF LIFE*

TO THESE WHOM WE CALL

"NEIGHBORS"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Grateful acknowledgement is made to Rev. J. W. G. Ward, D. D., Litt. D., Minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Oak Park, Illinois, for his graciousness in reviewing the manuscript of "Neighbors" and his helpful suggestions and criticisms. He and the people of his church have for many years been devoted friends and generous contributors to the work carried on at Erie Neighborhood House.

FLORENCE H. TOWNE

FOREWORD

IF LITERATURE means a vivid portrayal of human nature, with its passions and strivings, then this book, while making no such ambitious claim, is truly literature. It runs the gamut of the emotions from the gay to the grave, from humor to pathos, from comedy to tragedy. Every story is based upon fact. Yet each reveals wise handling and sound psychology, put forth in the name of Christ. The results achieved in reclaiming lives from criminality and vice, and in averting disaster by guiding what might be problem young people into useful and honorable directions, are beyond computation.

From personal knowledge of the work which Erie Neighborhood House is doing, and of the devoted leader who has given more than twenty-five years of her life to these people, we might suggest that a more fitting title for the book would be, "An Angel Amid The Alleys." Her modesty forbidding that, then perhaps that merited honor may be indirectly hers by calling the story of these folk, what her love for God and humanity has made them through the years—"Neighbors."

We warmly commend this volume to all who are concerned about the underprivileged, and who believe that a fence at the edge of the abyss is better than an ambulance at the foot.

J. W. G. WARD

CONTENTS

I.	A BIT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY	1
II.	"THE SWELL PICTURE"	4
III.	PUT THEM OUT OR KEEP THEM IN?	7
IV.	THE H. B. GANG	14
V.	THE MAKING OF AN ELDER	20
VI.	PATSY THE CRIMINAL	25
VII.	THE DRY DANCE	33
VIII.	"THE RELIEF PEOPLES"	38
IX.	LIGHT FOR "THE LEAST OF THESE"	46
X.	LITTLE MOTHERS	51
XI.	THE PICNIC	54
XII.	THE NEIGHBORS MARCH DOWN OUR ALLEYS	60
XIII.	WE INVESTIGATE POLITICS	67
XIV.	OUR YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE A DECISION	71
XV.	THE PERFECT GIFT	79
XVI.	THE NEIGHBORS SHARE	84

“Always remember that growth is a slow process and never forget to love unceasingly.”

“To prove that people are lovable, love them.”

“And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.”

I JOHN 4:21

I

A BIT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

FULL forty-five years before the writing of these stories, a child in a suburb of Chicago dreamed of the coming of Christmas. As she listened again to the stories of the singing angels and the wise men's journey, a great love stirred in her heart. She, too, would bring Him a gift, but she had so little that she could call her own. What could she bring so that the Christ would know how very much she loved Him?

Laboriously, patiently, she fashioned a pastey little calendar from pictures cut from a magazine. Lovingly she wrapped it in a piece of blue tissue paper which she had found in an empty shoe box. She had smoothed it out until it looked quite new. Taking the precious package in her hand, she stole out of doors into the snowy yard Christmas eve. There, under the shining stars, she lifted up the gift that she had made for Him. Perhaps if she gently "flip flapped" it upward, the angels might descend and carry it the rest of the way to Him whom she loved.

But no angels came. The pastey little calendar fell at her feet. It was cold waiting in the snow when one had broken shoes. The child picked up her gift and carried it back into the house. Carefully she hid it away at the back of a bureau drawer.

Winter gave place to Spring. The child watched as the first crocus pushed up through the snow. She liked to swing high under the trees, and feel the soft breezes blow through her hair. She loved the fragrance that emanated from the

rows of red raspberry bushes in the garden, as their fruit ripened under the warm summer sun.

In the twilight of the summer evenings, after supper, when the children of the neighborhood gathered out in front to play "Run, sheep, run," she loved to hide in the tall damp grass and listen to the calls of the tree toads and the Katydids. She made up happy little songs which she sang at her play. One must sing to express the joy in one's heart. God seemed very near. Vaguely she dreamed of perhaps some day going to Africa as a missionary, or as an alternative she might just marry a minister and help his people. She must some way find an outward expression for that love for Him that sang ever in her heart.

On the Easter after her eleventh birthday she made her confession of faith standing in the front of the Congregational Church in the little village where she was born. "You are a member of the church now," they told her. "You will be known as a follower of Christ." There were strange stirrings in her heart. She felt sudden tears in her eyes. She hurried home and found some snow drops and blue flowers pushing up through the snow. She gathered them and brought them to her mother. Easter came early that year.

* * * *

The years have passed. The child has long been a woman grown. For over a score of years she has chosen to make her home among the neighbors on Erie street. There, tumble down frame cottages crowd up against each other, two and three on a lot. In summer, the children swarm out into the streets and rat-infested, garbage strewn alleys. The hot sun beats mercilessly down on the dirty pavements and the children who play there. When one craves a bath, one opens the water hydrant down the street. The joyous shouts of the children can be heard blocks away. It is a noisy, dirty, crowded street, plentifully sprinkled with taverns and so called "candy stores," but up and down these streets live the neighbors—

Italian, Polish, Armenian, and a dozen other nationalities. Most of the neighbors are on Relief. A few are fortunate enough to have W. P. A. jobs. A very small minority have found private employment. Here, day by day, is fought out the struggle for existence. It is because of the neighbors that the child, a woman grown, has come to live on Erie street. Love for Him is the great driving force that makes no task seem impossible. It takes the weariness out of the endless procession of days and nights and fills them full to overflowing with joy.

II

“THE SWELL PICTURE”

TINY and Ruby lived just across the street from the Neighborhood House. Their dresses were always worn unironed and their shoes, far too large for their feet, were generally tied on with bits of rag. It was, however, their patient, quiet, little smiles that made me want to know more about the family.

One day when they were playing on our side of the street, I decided it was a good time to get better acquainted. Hand in hand we crossed over to where the mother was leaning out of the third floor window.

“May I come and see you?” I called, looking up. Her disheveled head disappeared from the window without a word. I guessed that the withdrawal might possibly mean I was welcome. Perhaps she was “picking up the room” preparatory to my visit. Guided by Tiny and Ruby, I climbed the rather insecure stairway that ran up along the outside of the building as far as the second floor. From there on, we groped our way up the inner-stairway to the third floor in utter and complete darkness, although the sun was shining gloriously outside. The children accustomed to the dark stairway ran up ahead of me and pushed open the kitchen door.

“Ma,” they called, “The teacher’s come.”

Just as I had expected, it was a desolate home. No wonder the children spent most of their time on the street. The mother, spare, toothless and barefooted, passed her hand swiftly over the seat of the only chair in the room and swept

to the floor the greasy crumbs that had rested there. She gave the seat an extra bit of polishing with her soiled apron before she pushed the chair toward me.

"Tiny's been eating her lunch there," she apologized. "Pa broke up our table. He's an awful nervous man, pa is."

Mother seemed fairly nervous herself. She stuttered badly and her poor lean shoulders twitched convulsively as she moved about the room trying to make it look a little more presentable.

A neighbor had told me that Mrs. Adams (this was an American family) had been that way ever since she was a girl about twelve years old. Her stepmother had tried to force her into a furnace in the basement and the child had been badly frightened. This same neighbor volunteered the information that three of the Adams children were not quite right. They were in the "dumb room" at school.

Bennie and Minnie were out on the tracks trying to hunt some wood, the mother said. George, the youngest, a fair-haired, blue-eyed, little boy about three years old, sat on the floor, thumping on an old tin pan.

"He calls that his drum," explained Mrs. Adams. "Georgie just loves drums. Sometime when Pa gets on his feet and things are going good, I aim to get him one of them toy drums at the dime store."

This accounted for all the Adams children but one, I thought to myself. There he was now, over in the corner of the room, watching me intently. Jimmy was fifteen, his mother said, but he looked no more than ten. His face was covered with pimples and his mouth puckered into queer shapes when he talked.

"Jimmy can't learn good in school," volunteered Mrs. Adams, "but he's a good boy around the house. He minds what I tell him."

I smiled at Jimmy. "Wouldn't you like to come over to Erie Neighborhood House?" I asked him. "What do you like to do best? Would you like to play games in our big

gymnasium, or would you rather make boats and aeroplanes with Mr. Stary in the craft shop?"

Jimmy seemed interested. "I like to draw," he said, speaking slowly with seeming effort. "I can draw swell pictures."

Jimmy's mother lifted her hand in protest.

"Listen, Teacher," she said. "He can't draw no swell picture, Jimmy can't. He just scribbles all over the paper like Georgie here," pointing to the little boy on the floor.

Jimmy looked indignant. He drew himself up to his full height.

"I can too draw," he declared. "I draw a real swell picture and then my hand gets kinda nervous and I scribble on top of it, but underneath there is a swell picture all right if ya can see it good." The boy nodded his head for emphasis.

Jimmy had preached a sermon without being aware of it. "Our neighbors are all like that," I mused. "Society may call them delinquents, criminals, drunkards or prostitutes, but hidden somewhere in each individual is a 'swell picture.' God put it there when he made us all in his image and likeness. Poverty, ignorance, sickness and sin, with their attending miseries have so 'scribbled over' the swell picture, half of the world even doubt its existence, but we who work for God know it is there."

I crossed the street again to the Neighborhood House thinking of this neighborhood of ours with its seething mass of helpless, hopeless folk, slaves to an established pattern of living, too starved physically, mentally and spiritually, too conscious of their own inferiority, to dare great things.

"Oh, God, the Father of us all," I prayed, inwardly, "help us to awaken these neighbors of ours to a consciousness of their birthright as children of God. Show us how to face with them the daily struggle up towards that which is finest and best. Because we believe in them and in Thy power and love, help us to work together with great faith, and high courage, attempting 'the impossible' in this small part of the world which we call our neighborhood."

III

PUT THEM OUT OR—KEEP THEM IN?

“**T**HAT fellow over there with the striped shirt, put him outside, yea and the guy next to him, that little kid too. Put them all out. They’ve got to behave in here.”

The ushers walking up and down the aisles looking for possible trouble, pounced promptly on the offenders. There was a scuffle. The assembly of some three hundred boys and girls who attended the showing of the stereopticon pictures every Friday night in the earlier days at Erie, rose en masse to stare at the ones who were being forcibly ejected. Sometimes “a big fellow” would take sides with the offender.

“Go on, give it to him, Pete,” he would cry. “He can’t put ya out. Ya paid your two cents, didn’t ya?”

However, the ushers generally won out. They dragged their protesting victims to the front door and thrust them outside. The door was hurriedly bolted against an onslaught of vicious kicks directed at the stout wooden panels. The kicks were accompanied by equally vicious language directed at the one in charge specifically and the whole institution in general.

The girls and boys, somewhat tense, settled back on their benches and the young man in charge with an outwardly satisfied smile resumed the showing of his pictures. But peace was not for long. “Now this picture—,” he began, then suddenly stopped short and stared fixedly at another offender. In his position at the front, his eye missed nothing.

"That guy over there, yea, the big fellow with the tin whistle, the one that's ducking, get him and get the fellow next to him, too. No, not him, not the little fellow, he's all right; it's the guy with the striped sweater."

Again the helpers to the rescue, again a scuffle in the aisle, again the front door bolted on the disturbers, protesting to the end that they "didn't do nothing." "The guy in front thinks he's just too smart."

And so it went on through the evening. The pictures over, the children filed out rather joylessly and somewhat noisily.

After the door had been permanently bolted for the night, those in charge rather wearily sat down together in the rear seats to talk things over. They had a vague sort of feeling that the evening with the children had not been a complete success. One of the ushers suggested that it might be a good thing to have two policemen come up from the Racine Avenue station on Friday nights and just stand by the door in case any of the older fellows got too tough.

"You never can tell what these Italians will do," he added. "It's better to be on the safe side in case of trouble."

"Sure he was a good boys' worker," said one of our young men the other day, one who had been a little boy in the audience during those early years, "But he always had everyone outside. You can't help the kids by keeping them outside."

Slowly we developed the new program, first at Erie Chapel Institute and then as we went into the new building and took the name of Erie Neighborhood House. We decided that force might be a temporary emergency measure, but it could never be used in any really constructive way. If the "swell picture" was to be recovered and brought to the light it must be through long time planning. We typed these words of wisdom on strips of cardboard and thumb tacked them over our desks, "Always remember that growth is a slow process and never forget to love unceasingly."

Every evening our largest room on the main floor was set

up as a young people's game room. The game room was most popular on winter evenings when often as many as a hundred young people gathered around the tables to play Chinese Checkers or work out jig saw puzzles. Sometimes a group would go to the piano and spend the whole evening together singing popular songs. At other times they seemed perfectly satisfied to just sit and talk. If one's family was on Relief and there happened to be no carpet on the floor, no fire in the stove, and only a kerosene lamp for light, it was good to have a place where one could meet the "girl friend" or the "boy friend" without having to spend any money.

Tombstone Tony, whose activities at Erie took more time in the weekly staff discussions than any other problem, was always among those present. He never stayed through the evening but drifted in and out, generally with his big gang of Polish fellows trailing after him like well disciplined pups taught "to heel."

Tombstone Tony had overheard a conversation one evening outside Erie's front door. Someone had said that Tony's whole family was no good and Tony was headed straight for "the pen," himself. Tony's father was known to have led a number of young girls into serious trouble. He also kept a gambling place in the rear of his so called "candy store." Tony's mother was a weakling, far from well, who cried a great deal and didn't seem to have much "say so" in the family affairs. Tony's older brother, Pete, was a fugitive from justice, wanted at present for a hold-up in a Greek restaurant, resulting in the fatal shooting of three men. It was fully a year ago that Tombstone Tony had heard this conversation about his family, but tonight he seemed unusually disturbed about something. He went into the game room and took out checkers but his mind wasn't on the game. Suddenly, he pushed the board aside and dashed out into the lobby where Emil, one of our own young men, working on W. P. A. was directing the game room traffic. Tony walked up to him with an ugly sneer.

"Listen here youse," he said. "Youse can talk about me all yez want to, but youse can't talk about me mudder or me fadder or me brudder or any of the rest of me family, see. The guy wot doz is goin' to have his dirty head punched in and the stuffings knocked clear out of him. I'll take yez on right now. Get me?"

Emil was Polish and as slow as Tony, Italian, was quick. Emil had no desire to be "taken on," besides he knew he had not been guilty of talking against Tony's family. Evidently Tony had "picked the wrong guy." He started to argue the matter out with Tony, but the Italian had no time. He was all for action when there were difficulties to be settled. He was constantly bragging about "taking somebody on."

With more ugly words his fists shot out in the direction of Emil's head. Fortunately a staff member was nearby and led Tombstone Tony back to the game room.

"Come on. I'll play a game with you," he said. Tony tried to play but his mind just would not stay on the game. Again he dashed out into the lobby. Again he was pulled away from Emil. The third time, the fight was just about to start in earnest. Dick, our boys' worker, a tall, quiet, well-poised young man put his arms around the little Italian and moved firmly towards the front door.

Tombstone Tony was "sore." "G'wan," he shouted, "put me out, will ya? G'wan call the cops. That's the way you do things at Erie."

Dick spoke quietly. "We are going outside a minute to cool off, Tony. I am going with you. Then when you think you've got hold of yourself we are coming back in. I have no intention of calling the police. I could, if I so desired. The telephone is handy. However, I think you and I can work this out by ourselves."

With Dick outside with Tony, I turned my attention to Emil.

"Go in the other office, Emil," I said, "and don't show your face until Tony has gone home for good. It doesn't

PUT THEM OUT OR—KEEP THEM IN? 11

do any good to argue with him. You just make matters worse. Dick and I will handle Tony."

I went into my office across from the general office where I had sent Emil. In a moment, the door opened and Dick came in with Tony.

"I think we can talk it over quietly in here," said Dick. "Let's get together, Tony. What's on your mind?"

Tony stood before us, his head down, but still defiant. The boy had just passed his eighteenth birthday. There was silence. Finally I spoke.

"Tony there is lots of good in you. You are a born leader. Dick and I have thought that before long you might be able to manage one of our Junior Boys' clubs, or have a boxing class in the gym. The little fellows always look up to an older boy especially if he has any special skill such as you have. You are the best boxer on the gym floor. We like to have you here at Erie, but you see we can't use you if you can't control yourself. That is the first lesson a leader has to learn. Besides, what have you against Emil? Emil hasn't said anything about your family. Erie isn't against your family. What gave you that idea? I know some things about your father that would put him in jail, but we haven't put him there. We hope some day to be able to interest him in our men's club. I wonder if you knew that we are helping your mother to get her teeth fixed and she is very happy about it. As for your brother, Tony, I am going to tell you something now that you never knew. Do you remember the time three years ago when Erie was robbed? One of the boys was killed by the police two days later. The second boy is serving time in Joliet now on another charge, *not* ours. Your brother Pete was the third boy. We did not send the police to arrest him because we hoped that we could get him to come to Erie Neighborhood House, show him we were his friends, and help him go straight. That's the way we try to do things at Erie."

Tony's head had dropped lower and lower as he stood

silently before us. Suddenly, he reached in his pocket and pulled out a very soiled handkerchief. Tombstone Tony, leader of the toughest gang on Erie Street, was crying.

"Yea," he sobbed. "I bet if you go by my house now you'll find my mudder cryin' and I can't do nothin' to make her glad. The cops just found my brudder Pete hidin' in our attic and they took him away. Maybe he'll be in now for life."

Then at last we understood. The police had finally "caught up" with Tony's brother; the poor, weak little mother was home crying. There was nothing that Tony could do but get the person who a year ago had talked about his family, and fight it out with him. He had come over to Erie with his gang for that special purpose. He had guessed unfairly that the voice he heard had been Emil's.

Both Dick and I talked to Tony a while longer with one thing in mind. Tony must know that we did care about him, that we believed in him and were ready to help him if he would give us a chance.

Suddenly the phone rang on my desk. It was Emil calling from the office across the hall. "Say," he said, "I knew Tony was in there with you and Dick so I just went outside a minute to look at my car. Tony's gang has cut my tires all to pieces. I have been thinking what to do about it and I guess I know what you'd want me to do, forgive him and be friends. Well, Erie helped me when I was a drunkard down in the gutter. Maybe I can help Tony. Ask him if he'll let me come in and talk to him, will you?"

I turned to Tony. "That was Emil on the phone," I said. "He just went out to look at his car and found your gang had cut his tires, but just the same he wants to be friends. Will you let him come in and will you talk to him decently without flying at his throat?"

Tony was silent for a moment; then rather huskily from deep down in his throat, "Sure, he can come. I won't fight him."

Emil came. Everyone at some time in his life has his shining hours. Emil was at his best.

"Perhaps you don't know, Tony," he said, "that I used to be a drunkard. Erie got hold of me and helped me back up. You couldn't have a better friend than Erie. I'd sort of like to pay back my debt. What would you think about you and I being real pals? We could go out in my car together and have a good time talking things over. What do you say? Is it a go? Will you put her there?"

Emil extended his hand and looked questioningly at Tony's averted face. Tombstone Tony hesitated just a moment. Then he lifted his head. The beast was gone. There was a new expression on his face.

"Sure, I'll put 'er there," he said, and Tony's lean brown hand, usually doubled into a fist, clasped the hand extended to him as if he was in dead earnest.

The two slipped out the door together. Tony's gang, lounging lazily on the lobby benches got up and followed them outside.

Emil reported the next day that Tombstone Tony and his gang had helped him patch up the tires.

"They were not damaged as badly as I at first thought," he admitted. "I was mad clear through and then I remembered the kind of a guy I used to be before Erie got hold of me. I remembered how you talked to me about Jesus' way being different. Well, I thought I'd better try it out as long as I am a deacon here at our church."

IV

THE H. B. GANG

THREE were ten of them that hung around Erie Neighborhood House, because they had nothing else to do.

They arrived in the lobby as soon as the janitor opened up in the morning and were the last ones out when we closed the building at 10:30 P.M. They were between seventeen and twenty-one years of age; most of them had not adjusted in school and none of them seemed to be able to find a job.

We had no program set up that could keep them occupied all day and in the evening also, so we finally agreed to have the Recreation room open for them three mornings a week if they would all promise to go job hunting the other two mornings.

However, on the mornings scheduled for the job hunt, the boys invariably turned up in the lobby about 10:30. They had tried, they said, but "it just wasn't no use." One of the boys had a weak heart and another, the tallest and lankiest of the lot, we guessed was a little subnormal. He had been in the ungraded room at grammar school and had finished up at Montifiore, our school for problem boys, or rather "boys with a problem."

The boys stayed in the gymnasium or recreation room for a short time but usually worked back into the lobby where they settled down comfortably on the benches. The lobby was much nearer the scene of greatest activity. One could see everybody who came in at the front door and pass the time of day with them.

However, with the boys in the lobby, it was not a very

quiet place for the rest of the neighbors. It developed into a place for argument, loud voices, scuffling, and often insulting remarks. In the course of the morning, a vase would fall over and be broken, some one's elbow would go through a window, or perhaps we would find that the notices which we had carefully thumbtacked on the bulletin board were completely covered with pencil scrawls and personal remarks.

No one, of course, ever saw who did these things. We discovered that the highest code of ethics that the boys seemed to know, placed first in importance, "Don't be a squealer." If a boy kept this one rule, he was a pretty good fellow.

The white haired, timid little old gentleman who worked on W. P. A. in the check room before he received his Old Age pension, was concerned about the gang as we all were.

"I don't mind the boys teasing me," he said, "but Miss Towne, I really think it looks bad for the visitors that come in. You know we have got to think of them, too. Now if we could just put these boys out, we'd have a nice quiet lobby."

Again we asked ourselves, suppose we do put them *out*, out where? It was winter. There were a number of gambling places, "candy stores," and ice cream parlors of ill repute in our neighborhood where altogether too many boys were already "hanging out."

Finally, one night, we invited the gang up to our third floor dining room for some ice cream and cake and a conference about the whole matter. The boys, a little embarrassed, ate greedily, spilling their cake and bumping into each other, telling jokes and laughing noisily. However a group cannot sit around the table and break bread without drawing just a little closer to each other. When the food had all been consumed, we talked over the things that had happened for which we felt the gang was responsible. The boys were silent and a little ashamed. After all, Erie was a pretty good place where a fellow could find a friend when he needed one.

"We are going to give this group a name," I said, "and we are going to expect you to live up to it. We are going to call you the H. B.'s." "What's that?" the boys asked with real interest. "That's for you to find out," I said. "That will be something to keep you busy all day tomorrow. The boy that guesses correctly will receive a prize—a pair of socks." I realized that the giving of prizes was frowned upon by up-to-date social workers—I also knew that a leader who knew her psychology did not "superimpose" a name of her selection upon any group even if the groups chose for themselves such names as "Killer Dillers," "Seven-Elevens," or "Naturals." I thought "Naturals" was quite a nice name for our toughest group of little neighborhood thieves until our boys' worker explained its derivation. It seemed one must be familiar with the game of "craps" to really appreciate the significance of this name.

Probably I might be slipping according to social work standards, but one thing of which I was sure was that the boys needed the socks. Three of the boys had great yawning holes at their heels. Two others wore no socks at all.

The next day the lobby was filled with excitement. The group was bent on finding out the meaning of "H. B." Dick, our boys' worker, suggested that it could mean "Hard Boiled" or "Habitual Bums" and fit the case very well. He even suggested "Hoboes" for an alternative.

For once, the boys grouped around old Mr. Harris in the coat room with genuine friendliness. "Go on, tell us, Mr. Harris, what do you think 'H. B.' means?"

Mr. Harris was touched by their overtures. "Well, Boys," he said, smiling. "It might mean 'Heavenward Bound.' You boys have been much better lately." I laughed when the boys came to me with Mr. Harris's guess. The name might fit the gang sometime in the future, but it did not seem to tell the story just now.

Finally towards night, Happy, the tall lanky boy with the yawning holes in his socks, thought he had the answer.

"I bet I know," he declared. "It's 'Honest Boys.' " "No," I said, "but you're getting warm. I'll tell you. It means 'Honor Bound.' That's the name of your club from now on. Live up to it."

We had many talks together about things the boys could do to really help at Erie. They did seem at times eager to try but were just awkward and clumsy, loud and irresponsible. Things were, however, improving in the lobby.

It was the first of April and we were making arrangements for the annual Sunshine Luncheon, sponsored by our Woman's Auxiliary. Between three and four hundred women from our interested churches were to be our guests that day. Lunch was at 12:30. For those who came earlier, we had set up our exhibit of the children's work in the girls' club room on the second floor.

I suggested that the H. B.'s might help on that day by being our ushers. We pinned blue and white badges on each one and gave them final instructions before the first visitor presented herself.

"When the ladies arrive," I explained, "first show them where the check room is located and help them check their wraps. Then suggest that they go up to the girls' club room and see our exhibit of handwork. After that, you can show them into the church. Herman will be playing some lovely music on our Hammond organ and they can sit there and enjoy it while waiting for lunch." It all seemed very simple. The hour was at hand. The boys lined up on two sides of the door.

Unfortunately, instead of a car load of people being the first to arrive, our first guest was a lone lady who had come on the street car. The H. B.'s remembered their instructions. Five or six of them all pounced on her at once. The lady seemed a little annoyed. No, she didn't want to check her wraps. She'd just keep them on. It was a trifle chilly.

Next the boys tried to interest her in the exhibit room. No, she didn't think she'd go upstairs. She wanted to wait

in the lobby for a friend. One of the boys came over to me, perplexed.

"What do we do now, Miss Florence?" he whispered.
"She don't want to do none of those things."

I told the H. B. gang to possess their souls in patience. It was early yet. By and by they would have more people than they could possibly care for. And so it proved. The boys went up and down, guiding and directing here and there, answering questions and carrying in bundles from the cars. I passed them several times with groups in tow and they all seemed to be thoroughly concentrating on their job.

At three o'clock our guests were saying goodbyes at the front door. A woman from the Riverside Church had been with us for the first time.

"Who are those fine outstanding young men who have been ushering us around all day?" she asked. "They have been so gentlemanly and so polite. That boy over there standing by the stairs was our guide. I wish you could have heard him talk about the work at Erie. I judged from the intelligent, enthusiastic way that he talked about 'what we do at Erie,' that he must be on your staff."

I looked over at the stairway. "You mean Walt?" I gasped, "That boy over there?"

"Yes," she said, brightly. "Is he your boys' worker? He is certainly an outstanding young man. You are to be congratulated."

The visitor passed on through the door as I tried to get my breath. Walt! Our boys' worker!

Six months before Walt's main objective in coming to Erie had seemed to be to steal the kindergarten pennies from the little wooden barrel bank that Miss Jane tried to keep locked up in her desk. His language too had been pretty bad. I smiled over at Walt. "You did a good job today," I said.

The boy grinned. "I had a swell time doing it."

The H. B's are all scattered now in various clubs. Some

of them have jobs and are holding them. Walt is teaching a Sunday School class of intermediate boys. His first attempt at service for Erie was at the Sunshine Luncheon, just two years ago.

V

THE MAKING OF AN ELDER

“**T**HERE is a book on your desk I saw one day when I was waiting in there to see you. Could I loan it? It has in it about a man called Jesus. I never heard about Him in all my life until my kids came home from Sunday School and began telling me what they learned about Him in Erie. He must be swell if He’s like what the kids tell me. I thought if you would borrow me the book I might learn more about Him. I can’t read real good but I’ll skip the big words.”

The speaker, a timid little Italian woman, had been brought to us by a neighbor not more than a month ago. She had been lying in bed with her new baby just a day old, when her husband had thrown a chair at her, cutting her head and nearly killing little Theresa. There were three older children at school and another little one at home.

John had been like this ever since Millie had married him. When she cried it just seemed to make her husband “madder.” John, tall and handsome with a mass of curly black hair and a mustache curling at the ends, despised crying women. That was all his wife did all day long, he said, just sat in a corner and cried and felt sorry for herself. When he got home she would worry and complain about everything under the sun until he threw something at her and stopped her noise. No man could stand her nagging. John spent most of his after work hours in the saloon. Some good fellows hung out at Pete’s place and one could always have a friendly game in peace and quiet. Occasionally John drank too much Italian

wine. Then Millie fled from her home in terror and stayed "by a neighbor lady" until the worst was over. Finally Millie decided she could stand it no longer, she was sick and tired of living. When the older children were at school and little Emanuella was asleep in her crib in the next room, Millie stuffed the cracks around the doors and windows with newspaper, opened the gas jets of the kitchen stove, and taking the youngest baby in her arms lay down on the floor to die. John would find her there dead on the floor when he came from work. The neighbors would all crowd in to look. Then perhaps her husband would be sorry. But it would be too late.

Fortunately the youngest baby stirred in her mother's arms and cried out. The little helpless cry challenged the mother's heart within her. With a sigh Millie got up, turned off the gas, threw open the windows and took up the burdens of life anew. It was that afternoon that a neighbor, learning of Millie's act, brought her to Erie Neighborhood House. I had talked with her inviting her to our club for young mothers. Perhaps, too, I suggested she would enjoy the cooking class. There was also the mothers' glee club on Wednesdays if she liked to sing. Then, of course, she and John must come together to the community program in the Recreation Room every Friday night. We laugh and sing and have good times together, I told her.

I could easily see how her sorry nagging disposition would irritate her big handsome impetuous husband, beast though he was.

"Try smiling at him instead of crying," I said. "See if it doesn't work."

Millie looked at me reproachfully. "You don't understand," she said. "I can't smile. I haven't anything to smile about. Life is terrible. I wish I were dead."

And now Millie was asking if I would "borrow" her "the book about Jesus."

I reached for the Bible. "Is this the book?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," she said. Her eyes brightened and the dreary listless look in her face almost disappeared for a moment as she tucked the book under her worn coat and carried it home.

It was a month or more before she brought it back and laid it on my desk. "It's wonderful," she said. "I am going to start English class on Tuesday nights so I can read it better and understand more good. John has read some, too. There are some places that are easier to understand, the parts you showed me. John has been kinder to me lately. Maybe it's the Book."

When I learned that Millie and John had not attended St. Mary's (the Italian Catholic Church in our neighborhood) for two or three years and that the two youngest children had not yet been christened, I invited them to come to our church at four o'clock on Sunday afternoons. John came once in a while but Millie was a regular attendant.

"The people are all so friendly," she said smiling. "And I like to hear the minister talk. It is easy to understand him." Millie was almost pretty when she smiled.

A year later at the Easter Communion, Millie presented herself for membership. As she passed by my seat on the way to the altar, she whispered, "You don't know how I've been praying that John would come too."

"Perhaps he'll come next year," I assured her. "It is much better for him to wait until he is very sure of the step he is taking."

At the next Easter Communion John did come. At the church reception the following Wednesday evening, he stood beside Millie, laughing and talking with the neighbors.

"She's a swell little wife," he said affectionately, squeezing Millie's arm. "No man's got a better one. She goes around our house singing like a bird and when she smiles, say I never noticed before how pretty she is. She's looking younger every day. It's just like a second honeymoon in our house."

Millie laughed happily.

"John is so changed," she said to me later. "I've got



“Neighbors”

Erie Neighborhood House to thank for it. Do you remember two years ago when I wanted to die? I can't believe that person was me. Who wants to die now? Why, life is just beautiful."

It is fully twelve years since Millie clasped the youngest baby in her arms and lay down in her bare little home to die. The youngest baby is now in her first year at Wells High School. One of the boys who first came home from the Neighborhood House Sunday School with the stories of Jesus was taken to the Heavenly Home. The other, Carme, is twenty-one, tall and handsome, a member of a musical troop which he organized and directs himself. Carme plays both the accordion and the violin cello.

"Music is my whole life," he told me recently.

The boys call themselves "The Trailers." A year ago the group travelled south on a radio tour. It was their first really big venture. Just before they left, Carme came in to see me.

"Everything I am," he said, "I owe to Erie. I'm going to try and make Erie proud of me. We will be away for some time but don't think I will ever forget God or what you taught me. I've tried to keep my life clean and straight. I know that's what God wants. When we get down south, I'll try to find a nice little Presbyterian Church and we'll go to church every Sunday if we're not working that time. And another thing—I wondered if you'd let me borrow one of our hymn books to take along. You see we are playing on the evening program. We don't want to give our radio audience all hot stuff. I thought for our last number each night we'd play and sing some nice little hymn tune to make them think of God."

Carme rose to go. He reached out his hand to say goodbye and then he hesitated. "I wonder, Miss Florence," he asked, "if you'd say a prayer for me before I go."

Three years ago our neighborhood church elected Millie as one of our deacons. She goes in and out among the homes

comforting those in trouble and trying to help them solve their problems.

"My heart is just so full of love for Him," she told me. "I just have to tell somebody else about how I feel. The neighbors tell me their troubles and I try to help them like you helped me. Life is so beautiful I think I never was so happy."

John is the same handsome, gallant, impulsive, Italian, though his mass of curly black hair is graying and the mustache was shaved off several years ago.

John is always in his place on Sundays. He has been an elder in our church for the last five years.

VI

PATSY THE CRIMINAL

HE SAT by my desk one morning, a tall lean boy in a light gray suit, just twenty-one years old. His face was hard and unsmiling.

Two days previous we had had a burglary at the Old Erie Chapel Institute. I had arrived in the morning to find telephone boxes torn from the wall and the contents of desk drawers and filing cabinets heaped on the floor. Envelopes which had held church offerings and club dues were torn open. The envelopes lay on the floor but the money was gone. Our typewriters and table silver were also missing. The wire grating in a basement window had been torn away. The door at the top of the basement steps leading to the hall outside the office was completely shattered where its panels were weakest. The door leading into the office had been forced. There remained no possible clue to the robbers' identity.

However, news travels fast. Three days later a seventeen year old boy was waiting to see me. He looked furtively about him and begged to see me alone in the office behind closed doors. He heard, he said, that I wanted to see him. The police had been over at his house. He could tell me a lot but—he must have ample protection. He was in trouble now about another little affair. He assured me he had nothing to do with Erie's robbery, but he knew who did it. There were three of them. They had asked him to come in on the job with them but he had not come. He had been home that night. His mother could testify to that. One of

the three boys, Vito Comero, had been killed by the police last night in another robbery. Had I read about it in this morning's paper? The other two boys, the same two who with Vito had robbed Erie, were in on this other robbery, but they ran and got away. One was Tombstone Tony's brother Pete. He had a hide-out somewhere in the neighborhood. His father kept a gambling place and had a "stand in" with the police. The other was Patsy. The boy didn't know a lot about Patsy except that he had been in trouble a number of times and had already done three and a half years in "the pen." He was out now on bond. He'd been trying to "raise money" to pay his lawyer. His case came up in the criminal court next week.

It was Patsy that sat beside my desk. He had come voluntarily to see me. I never knew just what his motive was in coming. Six years previous, as a boy, he had joined a club at Erie, but had dropped out and had been traveling in the wrong company ever since. Perhaps it was the old associations with Erie that were tugging now at Patsy's heart.

"I don't know why I did it," he said dully. "I never thought I'd fall so low as to rob a place like this, but I guess when a fellow starts going down, he doesn't care how far he goes. I'm a hardened criminal. I've been in this game for five years. I'm out on bond now. My case comes up next week. The fellows have been trying to steal a few cars to raise money to pay my lawyers but the cops are onto them. There's a lawyer who will get any guy out of any sort of trouble, even murder, but the guy's got to give him three hundred dollars. The lawyer has to pay a lot of others out of this money he gets. There's another lawyer who takes only one hundred fifty dollars, but he's not so sure of getting you off. Anyway the boys have only got together forty-seven dollars so far. I don't think I've got a chance."

"The thing is," Patsy went on, "if the Judge finds out all the crimes I've committed under different names, I'll be stuck for life. They've got me in court now as Rocco

Petrelli. Last time I was in under the name of Jim Fontana. I wish I was a kid again coming to Erie but it's too late now. I'll be a criminal the rest of my life. I can't break away from the racket."

I looked at the boy in front of me, dull, hopeless, unsmiling, wretched. He had told me he was twenty-one, just the age of my young nephew who would graduate this year from the University of Illinois. What a difference in those two young lives! Suddenly as I looked at Patsy sitting in front of me, I loved him. There *was* hope. It was *not* too late. There was something there beside the "hardened criminal," else why had he come this morning. If Patsy would reach out and take the hand offered him, I knew there would be no giving up until the victory was complete.

I talked with Patsy for an hour and he was willing to listen for he knew how much I cared. At the end of our talk he stood up with a tiny ray of hope in his dull, unsmiling face.

"I know," he said, "that I'll have to serve time when my case comes up next week. I don't know how long it will be, but if you think I can do it, well, as soon as I come out, I'll go straight to Erie and get into one of the clubs. And I promise I'll try to make good. Thanks. Nobody ever believed in me before. Goodbye, I guess I'll be going."

The next time I saw Patsy I was one of a great company of parents, relatives and friends lined up on both sides of the long corridor at the county jail shouting through small glass windows at the boys whose careless, hardened faces pressed against the windows from within. Since every one was shouting at once, the visit was not entirely satisfactory. I was not sure that I had heard all that Patsy said but I gathered that he'd been sent up for from one to five years, with some time off for good behavior. He might get a parole at the end of the first year, but he wasn't sure. He had not forgotten our talk together and he was ready to start new right now.

Once a month I heard from Patsy at Joliet. He'd been given the job of shovelling coal, he wrote. He had hoped for something better, maybe teaching mathematics or something in the prison school. He'd been good at that in high school, but a fellow had to have a pull to get anywhere. He went on to say, "So far my record is clean and I'm going to keep it that way. There isn't much to write about. Some of the fellows here have canary birds in their cells. The birds are real tame and will perch on a fellow's shoulder and stay there all day unless a fellow chases them off."

I wrote again and again to the Parole Board interceding for Patsy. The replies always came promptly and were most courteous. They intimated, however, that Patsy's previous record was such, they doubted if a parole would even be considered. "We do not believe in paroles for these third and fourth time offenders," they wrote.

At the expiration of his sentence Patsy was released, just four years, three months and twenty-two days since he sat at my desk, and decided to begin anew. It was a Sunday evening early in May when he appeared at our door, still lean and unsmiling, and looking quite a little older.

"I've come to start," he declared. "I was ready to begin all over again the day I went in, but they wouldn't give me a chance. I'm only afraid of one thing. Once a fellow has a record, the cops won't leave him alone."

"But, if you've done nothing wrong, they can't possibly arrest you," I assured him.

"It sounds all right," answered the boy, "but you don't know the racket. They frame you and what can you do? You've got a record. I'll go straight. I promised you."

Just a week later, Joe, Patsy's younger brother came running to me in great distress.

"The cops took Patsy," he told me. "They picked him up out here on Erie Street at one o'clock with my big brother Gus and some other boys. They let Gus and the others out but they kept Patsy."

"What did Patsy do?" I asked anxiously.

"Nothin'," declared Joe. "He was just standing there talking and the cops came along and took him. We can't see him because he isn't booked yet. Ma said to tell you, maybe you could do something. She cries all the time. They took him Friday night."

It was now Sunday. I got on the case immediately. Down at the criminal court, the officer at the desk was sympathetic but a little skeptical.

"He ain't booked, lady, and there's no possible way of finding out what it's all about until the officer that arrested him comes back on duty. The record shows he was given a three-day furlough. He won't be back until Monday evening on night shift."

"But I *know* Patsy's all right," I declared. "It's a mistake to hold him in jail all these days when he's done nothing wrong."

The officer smiled patiently. "Lady, they all say that. They are all sure their boy didn't do anything wrong and then they find out differently. There is no way of telling what he did, but it must have been something pretty serious or they wouldn't have held him without booking him. How can you be so sure he didn't do anything? You didn't follow him around every minute day and night did you? Those fellows that have served time more than once are generally pretty desperate customers. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you the home telephone of the officer that arrested him. See what you can find out. I hope you won't be disappointed."

"I *know* that boy's all right," I repeated, as he handed me the telephone number.

"Well, have it your way," said the officer, somewhat wearily. "But I've been in this game a good long time."

On Monday morning I finally reached the furloughed officer at his home. He was very willing to give full details over the telephone.

"Sure, lady, he's wanted for snatching a woman's purse.

The woman positively identified him from his photograph down at the detective bureau."

"When?" I asked.

"Oh," came back his reply. "This was two years ago but we just caught up with the fellow Friday night."

"But he was at Joliet two years ago. It couldn't have been he. He was there four years," I protested.

The officer seemed a little disappointed. "Well maybe he got out or something, came home, and then was picked up again. Why don't you go down to the criminal court and take it up with the chief? I'll phone him that you are coming."

After a long wait in the outer office, I finally was allowed to interview "the chief." I told him my story.

"Wait a minute," he said. "John, (to an aide) get me Joliet on the wire."

I listened as he talked over the phone with the Warden. "He was? H'm—he did? O.K."

He hung up and turned to an officer in the room. "Mike, go up and get No. 56217 and bring him down here."

I waited in suspense. Finally Mike appeared in the door with Patsy, haggard, disheveled, and with an expression of utter hopelessness in his thin, sullen face.

"You're discharged," said the chief. "There's a lady waiting for you."

We passed into the outer office. My friend of the Sunday night vigil sat at his desk.

"This is my boy," I said, triumphantly. "He *was* all right. I knew it. It *was* a mistake."

The officer looked almost disappointed as we passed out.

On the way home, Patsy rather sheepishly took out of his pocket a small, paper-covered edition of St. John. It was torn across the corner.

"After I had slept on that hard bench for two nights and I saw all the other fellows released one by one, I got disgusted," Patsy explained. "I decided there wasn't any use

in trying to be decent and that there wasn't any God that cared about a fellow after all. It was all rot. I was mad. I took this here book out of my pocket, tore it, and threw it across the room. In about an hour they called me. They said a lady was there. I guessed it was you. I went over and picked up the book and put it back in my pocket. It will stay there now."

The police never bothered Patsy again.

In February of the following year, the Eagles, a club of young men, made arrangements for their annual banquet. The banquet was always a very gala occasion. At this time the young people elected the most popular girl as queen and the most popular boy for king. These two favorites presided at the banquet. Patsy received one hundred more votes than any other contestant, and after that the committee stopped counting. "It's a cinch, he's got it," they said.

When Patsy arose at the banquet to give the speech of acceptance, before some three hundred of Erie's young people, the room fairly rang with applause. Less than eight months before, the boy had come back to the old neighborhood to start again. Patsy had made good.

It is over two years now since that start was made. Patsy is working at Erie Neighborhood House on the W. P. A. recreation project. The little fellows say he is a "swell leader." He has six boys' clubs, and also has charge of the young people's game room on certain evenings. In the morning he is attending college, looking forward to Neighborhood House work as a career. He is an outstanding leader, respected and admired by staff and neighbors alike. He has not attained this place, however, without a struggle. With some of his old friends he has broken completely. Others he has brought to Erie, begging us to do for them what has been done for him. Occasionally a new boy comes in to see our boys' worker. He has been sent by Patsy.

"Can I hang around Erie?" the boy asks. "The fellows wot hang around Erie go straight. I've got to go straight

this time. The third time in ain't no good for any guy."

Recently Patsy was showing through our building a group of visitors from Denver. The leader of the group, a young minister at the head of a Church House, stopped me in the hall with a smile.

"What do you think of this," he asked. "I just asked this young fellow what his church affiliations were. What do you think he told me? 'I'm not Protestant,' he said, 'and I'm not Catholic. I'm Presbyterian.' "

Patsy smiled. He is handsome when his face lights up with that smile of his, as it does now many times during the day. He knew I understood what he meant. His background was Roman Catholic, but it was at Erie Neighborhood House that he first found God and a new way of life.

VII

THE DRY DANCE

“**D**ID the gang tell you about it?” asked Tony, eagerly. He had come into my office to talk over the matter of his non-attendance at Washburne trade school. “I just can’t get started,” he explained. “I walked over once and got as far as the office and then I came back. I’d like to do what you want but I just can’t get interested in another school. It is Wells High or nothing.” Tony had been expelled from Wells a month previous for insubordination. He had not taken his expulsion easily.

“I hope you don’t feel too bad, Miss Florence,” he went on. “Maybe later on when the snow flies I’ll try it again. Not now. Perhaps this other thing we are doing for you will make up for not going to school.”

“What is it, Tony?” I asked. “I’d like to hear about it.”

“Well,” said Tony, “We are throwing a dry dance in the neighborhood, no liquor, you know. No drinks, no fights. The gang says I’m crazy, that it can’t be done in this neighborhood, but I tell ‘em it can be done and we’re the guys to do it. I said, ‘Remember the electric lights.’ ”

“The electric lights, Tony?” I said, quite at sea, “What do you mean?”

“Well they said, you know, he couldn’t and he did.”

With this lucid explanation I began to see the light. Tony was talking about Thomas Edison and his invention. I reminded him also of the Wright Brothers with their “flying machines,” and the opposition they also encountered. Finally we came back to the subject of the dry dance.

"The hardest thing," continued Tony, "is to find a hall where we don't have to buy their drinks. Some places make you buy their stuff. It's part of the contract you know. Moose is going with us to look for a place. Maybe he can talk the fellows into letting us do it our way."

"Moose," short for "Mussolini" was one of our neighborhood boys who was on our staff and attending George Williams College. "Moose" was also a deacon in our neighborhood church. He was a born politician. Just at present he was trying to decide whether he wanted to take up law and run for Alderman of our ward or definitely decide on Neighborhood House work as a career. Moose was an invaluable member of our staff. If anything was stolen, Moose had it back the same day and generally brought the boys back with him and got them into a club. He was familiar with all the "fences" and "hide outs" in the neighborhood but he never told where they were. He'd given his word to the boys and they knew he'd keep it. The boys respected Moose. They knew he was their friend, but they knew too that he'd have nothing whatever to do with anything that was dishonest or indecent or wrong, and he couldn't be "bought."

Moose, though just twenty-one, realized with us that perhaps the one greatest destructive force in our neighborhood was alcohol.

Every month Erie's young people sponsored a meeting on alcohol education and Moose could always be counted upon for a speech on the subject. It was slow work educating our neighborhood. Our old-country Italian families had always had their wine. It was not only a part of every wake, every christening, and every wedding feast, but generally a part of every evening meal if one was not on Relief and could afford it. However, our staff felt we were making progress in our neighborhood especially with our young people.

Gennie Milazzo, a member of our Senior Girls Club who was going to be married in June said for her part she did not want a drop of wine at the wedding but when she suggested

it, her father and mother, the god-parents and all the relatives "Up and hollered at her." They said that "people would talk" if they didn't give them any wine, so Gennie had to give in.

"They can have the stuff if they insist," declared Gennie, "but they needn't think I'd touch a drop of it, not after coming to Erie Neighborhood House all these years."

Moose went out with Tony to find a hall where they wouldn't have to serve drinks. It was an almost impossible task. The tavern keepers who rented the halls stared at them incredulously, asking, "What's the matter that you don't want no drinks?" This was a new pattern for our neighborhood and in Italian neighborhoods, especially, an established pattern was not easily broken. A young person might stand ever so bravely for his convictions surrounded by others of his kind, but the "old folks," the relatives and the god-parents were most difficult to convince.

Finally Moose and Tony found a place not far from Erie at Sabatuk's Hall. The proprietor promised that he would not serve drinks to any young people who might come down stairs to patronize his tavern but he couldn't refuse drinks to others who came in from the street while the dance was in progress. There was a bar at the back of the hall.

"We are going to give that bar the surprise of its life," Moose said.

The boys put in a supply of ginger ale and root beer and an interested friend in Oak Park who had heard of the Dry Dance contributed some delicious fruit juice which made a most refreshing drink.

It was necessary for anyone using a hall to provide two policemen for door duty at five dollars apiece. The owner of the hall decided if Erie Neighborhood House was back of the boys, one policeman would perhaps be sufficient protection.

The first officer left before I came over. I was told he looked in at the bar and said in disgust, "What, no drinks?

I guess I'll be moving on. I'll ask the Captain to send another officer around."

The second policeman was of an entirely different caliber. We had quite a talk together. "Say," he said, "do you know this is the first time in the history of this neighborhood that this thing's been done? You are doing a great job over there at Erie Neighborhood House. I've been here all evening and there hasn't been a single fight. We usually have a good dozen or more before the evening is over."

The evening passed happily. Tony found a stranger who had come in with a bottle in his pocket and he promptly took it away from him and brought it to Moose who smashed it against a pipe and emptied the contents into the sink. The stranger was angry.

"Say," he cried, "you can't do that. I just paid sixty-five cents for that stuff."

"Well, next time," said Tony, "you will know better than to bring it into a place like this. This here is a dry dance, with emphasis on the *dry*. Get me?"

Towards the end of the evening there was some confusion at the door. Suddenly, as I sat along the side of the hall, there shot past me a flying wedge of boys in their late teens or early twenties. Their sweaters were dirty and their caps awry. Each boy had his hands on the shoulder of the boy in front of him as they pushed and shoved noisily through the crowd to the front of the hall. There they disbanded and were lost among the dancers. If one had been a timid soul, one might have been a bit frightened by the unwashed, rowdy appearance of the boys. Not being naturally timid, I was amused when Tony suddenly appeared in front of me with the leader of the gang by the arm.

"Gwan," he snarled at him. "Apologize to her. That's her. Gwan, say it."

The boy had his cap in his hand. He had smoothed down his hair and adjusted his dirty sweater until he looked a little more presentable. He grinned rather sheepishly.

"Aw we didn't mean no harm, lady," he said. "Tony's gang bust into our dance without paying so we promised him we'd get even and bust into his dance the same way. We didn't mean to scare you."

"You didn't scare me," I said, "but you do look a lot better with your cap off. Come over and see us at Erie Neighborhood House some time."

The boy said he'd come and now, satisfied, Tony led him away.

Moose had gotten hold of a loud speaker somewhere. He jumped up on the platform now and addressed the crowd. The loud speaker did not work very well but Moose did his best.

"Are you all having a good time?" he shouted. The crowd assured him they were. "Is there anybody here who feels he'd be having a better time if we served drinks?" There was silence. "Good," called Moose. "That means no. Now listen, this is our first dry dance in this neighborhood but it won't be the last. You all know what Erie Neighborhood House is trying to do. It's trying to make this here a better neighborhood and make us better neighbors. You all know what drink does to you. Nobody's going to go home and wake up tomorrow with a headache or have his best friend tell him he had too much and acted like a fool—all because Erie Neighborhood House cares. All in favor of another dry dance real soon say 'Aye.' "

The room rang with enthusiastic ayes. "Good," called Moose, "the Ayes have it." He jumped down from the stage and mixed with the crowd.

The pattern had been broken. The first dry dance had been a success.

VIII

“THE RELIEF PEOPLES”

SARAH HAGOPIAN first came to Erie Neighborhood House because she wanted to learn English. She, her mother, Peroos, and her father, Kazar, had very recently come to America from Turkey. Sarah looked old for her nineteen years. There was a sadness too in the faces of Peroos and Kazar. They seldom smiled. Terrible things they had seen in Turkey, Sarah explained brokenly. It was difficult to keep the tears back as one recalled the years of suffering. There had been five brothers, all lost, maybe murdered by the Turks, Sarah was not sure. They had looked and looked for them before coming to America but could find no trace of them anywhere.

Sarah was only two years old when the Turks had seized the brothers. The boys had begged that the little sister might go with them, so the baby was taken away also. Peroos and Kazar searched for their children for many years, and finally found Sarah living in a Turkish family being brought up as their own child. The girl was twelve years old when her mother came to her and showed her that she had proof of her parenthood. Sarah was indignant. “So,” she cried, “You, a dirty dog of an Armenian, would try to steal me away. No, I am Turkish. Go.” But the mother would not give up so easily for she had ample proof that the girl Sarah was the baby that had been stolen from her ten years earlier. One night Peroos and Kazar carried a burlap sack to the Turkish home. Slipping it over the head of their daughter to stifle her cries, they carried her away with them. Only then were



Summer on Erie Street

they able to persuade her that she was their own child. With Sarah now they must get to America. They would all find work there, and would spend the rest of their days in comfort and peace.

They were, however, to encounter further suffering and witness many tragedies before they finally reached the coast. There they met Haiganoush Demirjian waiting also for passage to America. The face of Haiganoush showed marks of great suffering. She said they had started out together for the coast several weeks back, a little band of a dozen women and children. They had agreed among themselves that if any of them should reach the coast in safety, the mother who survived should take whatever child or children survived as her own and bring them safely to America.

Haiganoush wiped away a tear. She alone had reached the coast in safety—but she bore the mark of a Turkish knife in her back. Oh it was terrible, terrible to see her friends murdered before her eyes. She could not talk of it—please. Haiganoush buried her face in her hands. And so Haiganoush, Peroos, Kazar and Sarah finally reached America. They had stayed in New York for a few weeks and then journeyed to Chicago. Kazar knew Armenian friends in the rug business here. Kazar himself was a cleaner of rugs. Perhaps with these friends he could find work.

The Hagopians found rooms on Erie Street. Kazar found a small job with his friends but the Armenian was too old. He had gone through too much suffering in Turkey. He could not work fast. Sarah must learn English. Then she could find work when Kazar must give up. Sarah would learn fast in this new country. They would be proud of her some day.

So it happened that Sarah Hagopian came to Erie Neighborhood House to learn English. Sure, she went to school during the day, but she must learn faster. She would go to both day school and night school, and soon she would be a good American.

The teacher of the English class at Erie Neighborhood House thought Sarah seemed lonely, and told her about the club for older girls that met at the House on Thursday evenings. Would Sarah like to attend? "Sure I go," said Sarah eagerly, "only I not speak much good English. I am ashamed, maybe the girls laugh." But the girls did not laugh. They called themselves the "Girls' Friendship Circle." They took Sarah under their wing and soon she was laughing and singing with the rest. "I have swell time," she said, smiling. "You good friends."

Things were working out very well. Sarah was learning fast. Peroos and Kazar were losing the tense, worried expression that they had worn when they first came to America. Then suddenly Kazar lost his job.

The friends were sorry, but business was not so good and Kazar could not work fast. He must not forget that he would soon be an old man.

Kazar grew older as he tramped the streets hunting in vain for work. He was a good rug cleaner, he knew, but they would not give him a chance to show what he could do. He was too old, they said.

The Hagopians had seen their friends murdered before their eyes. They had lived through days and nights of terror and anxiety, but never had they faced hunger as they faced it now. Here was a new experience. There was only one thing left to do. They must go on Relief.

So Kazar found himself with a great company of other neighbors sitting patiently in rows waiting for his number to be called. Some one called this "Intake." Kazar did not know what "Intake" was, but he did not like the way they shouted at the people. Kazar wondered if they would "holler" at him like that when his turn came. He had come to the Station at eight o'clock that morning. At noon he was still sitting there. He heard the workers at the various desks talking about going to lunch. Kazar would have enjoyed a cup of hot coffee himself. At two o'clock the workers all

returned looking refreshed and rested. Kazar still sat. At five P.M. his number had still not been called. The policeman stepped briskly to the front of the room and called, "All out, we close at five. Come back tomorrow." Those who had been waiting dumbly on the benches got up and shuffled out without a protest, but Kazar put his hand on the policeman's arm. "Please," he said, "we have at home nothing. I wait all day. Please you help." "I said 'tomorrow'" shouted the policeman as if Kazar was a long way off. "Get out before I arrest you." Kazar withered. Like the others with his head down he shuffled out the door and back to Peroos and Sarah. He felt very old and helpless. This was America. They shouted at you when you did nothing wrong. In Armenia Kazar had been a man in high standing. His father had been a professor. They had much money in those days. Kazar was an Armenian gentleman. He wished he did not have to go back there tomorrow.

The Hagopians had been on Relief now for fully six months. Every two weeks they received a check for \$15.89. The case worker made out a budget for them. The amount they received however represented only eighty per cent of the budget. Kazar was lucky, a neighbor told him, to get that. Last summer the Relief gave only sixty-five per cent of the budget. People could not live.

Peroos and Kazar decided they must first pay the rent. They had seen a neighbor evicted that winter. Her small things had been thrown out into the street from the windows on the third floor. They had landed in a snow drift. Peroos could see the woman yet, going about softly crying to herself and picking her belongings out of the snow. It was terrible to be evicted. They, of course, would have to eat much less.

One day a man called to turn off the gas. Peroos pleaded with him to no avail. "Take it up with the Relief Station," he told her, but Peroos knew by this time what the Relief would say. It was always, "There is nothing we can do." It was so utterly final. If they'd just hold out some hope.

NEIGHBORS

Sarah carried their food over to Erie Neighborhood House and cooked it on the big stove in the kitchen, but she was far from happy. "I am so ashamed," she said. "The neighbors, they see what we eat. Always I carry it back and forth." Sarah did not laugh as much as before.

Finally Peroos fell ill. Sarah tended her as best she could but Peroos needed hot baths and hot soups to drink. They could not make hot things with no gas. Once the girl went for hot water to Erie Neighborhood House but the water was cool before she could carry it down the street and up to the third floor rear where they lived. Besides Peroos had needed her when she was away. Often I found Sarah softly crying to herself. "Those Relief Peoples," she said indignantly. "They do not care what hard times we have." Kazar spent many days tramping the streets looking for work. He was labelled at the Relief station as "unemployable."

Slowly Peroos returned to health but the strain of being on Relief was telling on Sarah. She cried a great deal and seemed suspicious of the kindly overtures of the case worker when the latter called at the home. "They do not care for us," Sarah would say through her tears. "They holler always at my father."

Finally Sarah was forced to ask for the help of the Relief station in caring for an aching tooth. It was before we had established our dental service at Erie Neighborhood House, a service which has brought help and comfort to literally hundreds of our neighbors.

The Relief agreed to send Sarah to the Relief Dentist. He would, however, only pull the tooth. The Relief could do nothing about having a tooth filled. Kazar decided it was best for him to go along with his daughter. She had been crying too much lately.

The dentist had been working with Relief clients all morning. Here was another just when he should be going to lunch. He felt unusually irritable with all the world in general and with Relief clients in particular. "Hurry up,

girl," he said roughly. "Get into that chair." Kazar waited in the adjoining room. The dentist took out a needle preparatory to administering a local anesthetic. Sarah screamed and pulled back his hand. "What you do? You try to poison me. I know. The Relief, they have too many peoples. You want you should kill me. Pa—pa—" Kazar heard his daughter call and hurried towards the inner office. "Shut up," shouted the Relief dentist to Sarah as he tried to shut the door. Kazar however was too quick for him. He placed his foot firmly in the opening and refused to budge. "Give me my daughter," he demanded. Sarah with tears streaming down her cheeks found refuge in her father's arms. "The Relief peoples, they want they should poison me," sobbed the girl.

When Sarah reached home, she went to bed and there she stayed for many weeks. No one could help her. The doctor called it a form of nervous collapse. Over and over again the girl moaned out her story about the "Relief peoples" who wanted to poison her.

She was sure they had their way and she was dying. She lived over again the horrible scenes in Turkey. The Turks and the "Relief peoples" were strangely confused in her mind.

Again the terrified look came back into the eyes of Peroos and Kazar. We spent long hours beside Sarah's bed trying to make her laugh in the old time way, while Peroos and Kazar stood anxiously by, watching our efforts. If we could only get Sarah over to the Neighborhood House, playing again with the children, we felt it might help. Once we succeeded in getting her there, but in five minutes she ran home again crying.

The case worker was sympathetic. She knew of other cases like Sarah's where the Relief was not enough. These cases had finally been committed through the Psychopathic Hospital. She would stop and see the girl on her next day out in the district. However, her presence one day at the Hagopian home so terrified Sarah the worker hastily withdrew and decided not to try it again. Thereafter she trans-

acted her business with Kazar and Peroos at the Neighborhood House.

One day Kazar appeared at our door with a beautiful Armenian spread. "You know some rich peoples maybe," he queried, "who would buy this spread for fifty cents. This spread, it is precious to us. We brought it with us from Armenia. We would never part with it but it is for my daughter. The doctor says Sarah must laugh. I must take her to a show and make her glad. I have no money for shows. We will give the spread to make my daughter laugh." I gave him some money to take Sarah to the show but we did not take the spread. He carried it back home to Peroos.

That week we arranged to have Kazar take Sarah to a nerve specialist at one of our leading hospitals. Their findings came to us in the mail the next morning. We read, "The patient has an advanced case of Dementia Praecox. Nothing can be done to help her. I have urged her father to have her committed before she becomes violent as cases of this type invariably do. He, however, seems unwilling to do this. There is absolutely no possibility of cure."

Kazar came in as we were reading the letter. "All my boys lost in Turkey," he said. "Please, Miss Florence, you save my one girl, please." He held out his arms pleadingly toward me.

What could we do when the best doctors available said there was no hope? We could only attempt the impossible with God.

And so for six more months we worked to get Sarah back on her feet, to erase the scribbles of fear and prejudice that bound down a normally well mind and a triumphant spirit. As we worked we prayed. Little by little Sarah returned to normal.

The "Relief peoples" suggested that perhaps it would be wise to move the family out of the neighborhood into more pleasant surroundings where there would be trees and grass and where Sarah would not be constantly surrounded by poor

people in trouble. It would mean a larger expenditure for rent, they said, but perhaps that could be managed if it would help the girl to forget. Sarah smiled through tears which came less frequently of late. She was beginning to realize that perhaps after all the "Relief peoples" were her friends.

Whenever Sarah could obtain carfare, she came back to the Neighborhood House to help with the children's sewing classes.

One day she came in smiling happily with a folded white paper clutched tightly in her hand. "Look," she cried joyously, "I have job. I work W. P. A." The paper stated that Sarah Hagopian was scheduled to start work at Erie Neighborhood House Monday morning as Recreation Assistant at \$65.00 a month.

Sarah has been working with us now for two years teaching classes in sewing and handcraft. The children love her.

"Sarah," I said the other day, as she went singing about her work with a happy smile, "what would I ever do without you?" She gave my arm a squeeze and smiled happily. "What would I ever do without Erie Neighborhood House?" she said.

Kazar and Peroos come with Sarah each Sunday to our church service. They look happier than they have looked in years. "My daughter she have nice job," said Kazar to me one day. "She all time glad. It is good to be in America."

IX

LIGHT FOR "THE LEAST OF THESE"

I DISCOVERED her holding a bit of burning newspaper under a kettle of water. She was trying to heat the contents sufficiently to make a cup of tea.

"I wouldn't mind being without a fire," she explained "if I could just have light, and I wouldn't be so afraid in the dark if I was only warm. A body gets so lonesome when it is both cold and dark. In the night I get out of bed to get a drink of water and I stumble over the furniture. I pray every night that God won't let me die that way—falling over things in the dark and breaking my neck."

I drew my coat closer about me in the cold room as the little old lady beside me, hunched up in her ragged sweater, talked on and on.

It wasn't quite so lonesome, she said when a body had some one to talk to, some one to whom she could tell her troubles.

The small garbage burner in front of me was cold and cheerless. The gray twilight crept in through the rear windows filling the room with ever deepening shadows. There was a lamp on the table before us but it held no oil.

"How much does it cost you to have light?" I asked.

"Only a quarter," answered the little old lady. "A quarter will buy enough oil to last me all month, but I couldn't squeeze the quarter out of the food money this time. The Relief gives me only \$2.00. It is supposed to last the whole month.

They say my married daughter should do something for me but her husband isn't working. They haven't enough for themselves. I bought some bread and tea and sugar the first of the month. There wasn't enough for coal or oil. I am hoping that perhaps next month I can have light."

I fumbled in my purse in the gathering darkness and found two quarters which I placed on the table beside the empty lamp.

"Use one for oil," I said. "The other will buy a bushel of coal."

The darkness had settled down around us. The little old lady was hardly more than a shadowy form before me but her voice pierced through the gloom in joyous ecstacy.

"Both?" she exclaimed happily. "You mean I can have both?—oil in my lamp and a fire in my stove? God is very good to me."

* * * *

Later in the week I visited in another home at the twilight hour. A girl about seventeen years of age sat listlessly beside the table, her hands resting idly in her lap. Another child of perhaps thirteen was crouched up close to the window, straining her eyes as she bent over her book in an effort to take advantage of the last of the fading daylight to finish her "home work." Lena, twelve, stood beside her mother as the woman told of her struggle to keep a home for the three girls.

Joe, her husband had left them three years ago. He got disgusted, she explained, because he couldn't find work. One night they "had words" and Joe "got mad" and said he'd leave home for good, and they could go on Relief. There was an older boy, too. Peter was nineteen. He was a good boy, his mother said, until he began going with the gang that hung out at the candy store on the corner. Peter was going with an Italian girl, Carmella, but he couldn't take her out because he didn't have a job. The gang told him of a way to make some easy money. The first night out, some one "tipped off the cops." The gang got away but Peter was

caught and sent up for ten years. It seemed Peter was holding the gun.

The mother wiped away a tear. "The Relief is no good for us," she declared. "For three months we have no light, no fire. The children must eat. There is not enough for coal or kerosene. The Relief does not give enough for poor people. Susie, now," she went on, pointing to the older girl sitting listlessly at the table, "she is a young girl. She likes to have her girl friends and her boy friends by the house but what can she do, the poor girl? Her friends cannot sit in the dark. Tillie is getting sore eyes." The mother nodded towards the child at the window. "Every night she waits for the street light to come on. She sits close trying to see but it is not enough light. Tillie doesn't do so good at school. The teacher gets fresh and hollers at her. Last week we had a candle but it is burned down. Tonight there is nothing."

"We have some candles," I said. "If Tillie will come back with me to Erie Neighborhood House I will give her some to bring back to you."

Tillie and I climbed down the stairs together, groping our way along in the darkness until we reached the street. I was glad for the bushel basket full of candle ends which had been brought to us by our friends in interested churches and now reposed in one corner of the "old clothes room" but there was a dull uncomfortable feeling in the region of my heart. I was not sure that the candle ends that I would give to Tillie would entirely solve the problem to my complete satisfaction. "Susie is a young girl," the mother had said plaintively. Some way I could not erase from my mind the picture of Susie sitting in the darkness with dull despair written on her young face.

Beside this picture there arose another—a group of gay laughing teen-age boys and girls holding their Christmas meeting of Tuxis in the warm cheerful parlors of a suburban church. They snapped off the lights as they gathered for

their devotional service around the shining Christmas tree. At the close of the meeting some one pressed a button and again the room was flooded with cheerful light. "It is so important," said one of the leaders to me, "to provide the right kind of an atmosphere for these girls and boys of high school age."

The day after I had given the candles to Tillie, I stopped in to see Sophie Dubinecki. Sophie was a member of the Templeton Club, a young mother with her two small children always clinging to her skirts. Today Sophie's eyes looked red and weary. She spoke listlessly as she sank into a chair and lifted the little boy Steve to her lap. Sophie's husband had been in Elgin State Hospital for the insane for three years. The young mother brought the children each week to the Social Hygiene Clinic for "shots." Sophie took the "shots" also. Emil had given them all this sickness before he went crazy and had to be taken away, Sophie had explained to me on an earlier visit to her home.

Today the little Polish girl was plainly discouraged. The tears came as she talked.

"Steve is getting the same sickness as his father," she explained, "I mean the fits. In the night he wakes up and cries out. I have no light, only the candle. I fall with him in the dark. I am afraid. If I could only have one little light. The Relief says poor people can't have no light. If we have light, then we cannot eat. My children are hungry. They must eat, but we need, too, the light."

"How much was your last light bill?" I asked her. "I mean when Emil was working."

"Not so much. The last bill was \$1.18," answered Sophie. "But the Relief say that is too much. I cannot have light like rich peoples have."

It was early in January when I visited with the little old lady, with Tillie's mother, and with Sophie Dubinecki. Three weeks previous the world had celebrated Christmas. I had driven with a friend along the North Shore one eve-

ning to see the brilliant display of outdoor lights in front of the homes along Sheridan Road. Each year at the holiday season, people vied with each other in creating the most original and elaborate display.

In one yard, every little bush was aglow and every blade of grass had its tiny light. For two or three miles on either side of the road a glitter of brilliant lights proclaimed the birthday of Him of whom it was written, "Though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor that ye through His poverty might be rich."

Now this scene arose before me as I thought of the little old lady, of Tillie's family, and of Sophie's despairing cry "If I only had one little light."

The splendor of one small bush would have kept a small light in Sophie's home for fully six months. I wondered—In seeking to honor Him had we forgotten His words of long ago:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these—ye have done it unto me."

X

LITTLE MOTHERS

THREE of these little mothers I discovered in our neighborhood all in one day as I was making some afternoon calls. The fourth lives right across the street. I can look out of my window and see her as each day the "Shirley Temple dolly" is taken for a walk.

The first little mother was sitting on the steps as I passed by, swaying back and forth and softly crooning to a very dear something held tightly beneath a ragged little coat. Where did Mamie Scopinsky get a dolly, I wondered. She had moved into the neighborhood shortly after Christmas so I knew it could not have been a doll from our Christmas tree. I stopped beside her. "May I see your dolly, Mamie?" I asked. "Sure," said the child, opening her coat. "Here's my dolly." Hugged close to her breast was a pint milk bottle with a little rag fastened over the "head" and tied under its "chin." "It's a nice dolly," I said, smiling as Mamie covered it again with her coat and continued her crooning.

Three blocks further down, I was passing the Scavone home where the father had recently passed on, when seven year old Tessie Scavone came running out of the passage way, trying to hide some loved object in the folds of her scanty little black dress. Mrs. Petrilli, a neighbor, had made the dress out of an old apron so "Tessie, poor child, would look decent at the funeral and show proper respect." Tessie had almost reached the sidewalk when her mother appeared around the corner of the house and made after her. The child quickened her pace but her mother overtook her and

dragged the object out from the protection of Tessie's skirt. It was a piece of kindling wood with a little black rag of the same material as Tessie's dress, tied about its middle. Mrs. Scavone saw me and started to explain. "If she doesn't take my last piece of kindling wood when I'm not watching and make a doll out of it. Aren't you shamed, a big girl like you, your father dead and all." She gave Tessie two sharp little slaps, pulled off the black sash and dropped it on the pavement. Tucking her kindling wood under her arm she turned toward the house but Tessie threw herself on the sidewalk brokenhearted. "Mine dolly," she wailed. "Mine dolly. Mine mother took mine dolly."

An hour later I stopped at the Kamisky home. Sophie, aged eight, was scrubbing away at a tub full of dirty clothes. Mother wasn't in, she said brightly. She'd gone by a sick lady. Maybe she'd come back. Sophie didn't know. Babies of various sizes played about on the floor at Sophie's feet. I decided to come in and wait a while for Sophie's mother. After the first ten minutes, conversation began to lag. Under the table I spied a strange oblong stuffed object, much battered and dirty—"What is that?" I asked Sophie, pointing at it. Sophie stopped scrubbing and reaching under the table dragged the object out into the light. "That's mine dolly," she said happily. "I found it in the alley. I am going to fix it up for my little sister, Mamie, some day. She just loves dolls. It hasn't any head or any arms or any legs. It has a stomach just." Sophie clasped the "stomach just" to her heart. Perhaps the smile in her eyes was the dream of what the "stomach just" might become when Sophie had time some day to fix it for little Mamie.

It was years later when I discovered from our office window, the fourth doll. Two little girls were out walking with the dolly between them. The head, boasting a single strand of hair, wobbled back and forth as the children walked. It was dressed in a long white garment that trailed on the ground and kept me from discovering that one leg was miss-

ing. It was such a forlorn little object but was being tended so proudly by the little mothers. "I'd like to get that picture," I thought, "and use it for our new folder."

The next day I spoke to Miss Marie about it. "Will you take your camera," I asked, "and see if you can get that picture as I saw it yesterday? The children live right across the street in that two story frame building, on the second floor. I've seen them looking out of the window. The smaller child is called "Tiny." Miss Marie crossed the street and stood looking up at the window. Suddenly Tiny appeared. "What you want?" she called. "I want to take a picture of your dolly," called Miss Marie, "the big dolly that you had out for a walk yesterday. Tell your sister to come, too." "You mean my Shirley Temple dolly?" called Tiny from the window. Miss Marie was a trifle nonplussed. She was sure that we did not want a picture of a Shirley Temple doll, but how could a Shirley Temple dolly have possibly gotten into our neighborhood. "Just bring your big dolly, Tiny, the one you had yesterday." The child's head disappeared from the window and soon the two little girls appeared around the corner of the house with the doll between them—such a forlorn, dejected looking dolly. At close range she was a pitiful object indeed. Both eyes were gone and there was a hole where her mouth should have been. The one strand of hair waved wildly in the breeze, and her head fell over on her chest. "This is our Shirley Temple dolly," said Tiny, proudly. "Hold her head up, Ruby, so she'll look pretty in the picture."

I never asked the children why they had called the funny broken wreck of a thing "our Shirley Temple dolly." There had been perhaps in their hearts some time a great desire, a dream of possession. There had been great faith and love and lo, the dream had seemed real. In thought a Shirley Temple doll really rested in Tiny's arms. All may dream—even a little child on Erie Street.

XI

THE PICNIC

IT WAS a glorious Saturday morning in May. We sat on the steps, the children and I, and felt the soft warm spring breezes blow against our faces. On the corner some Polish children had piled their coats on the sidewalk and were playing hop-scotch. Across the street two of our Italian neighbors leaned out of their windows and passed the time of day.

Somewhere in the suburbs in some one's yard, I felt sure there were lilacs in bloom and perhaps gay red and yellow tulips bordering the walk. And the trees—I wondered just how far along the new baby leaves were by this time. I thought of a verse that I had read in the news letter sent to us semi-monthly from the Council of Social Agencies. It seemed to especially fit our case.

“The roofs are shining with the rain,
The sparrows twitter as they fly,
And with a windy April grace
The little clouds go by.
But the back yards are bare and brown
With only one unchanging tree;
I could not be so sure of Spring
Save that it sings in me.”

I looked over at the square space in front of our door where we were trying to grow some grass. If we could only keep little feet off of it long enough to give it a chance! Some of the older boys had made a railing around it with iron pipe



Citizens of Tomorrow

and around that we had fastened some chicken wire to keep dirty papers from blowing in. The children did love to walk on the rail and invariably when they toppled over, it was into the grass plot rather than on the cement sidewalk. "It feels good. I like to fall on the grass," explained Carmella. "But it won't grow," I had said. "Each blade of grass has a little root that goes down into the soft earth. When it's so very tiny our feet will crush it and it will die." Carmella looked surprised. "Oh teacher," she said, "I didn't know it was real."

Yesterday I had watched from my office as a stranger child about six years old came down our street. In the corner of the square was a little tuft of grass, taller and braver than the rest. The stranger child spied it and down the steps she came. (One comes *down* from the street to our front door.) Quickly she pulled off a ragged shoe and a more ragged little stocking and sitting on the rail, reached her foot over and softly touched the clump of grass, wiggling her toes in ecstasy as they rubbed against the cool green blades.

Suddenly down the walk came a boy a year or two older. "Oh, Look'it, she's stepping on the grass," he cried. "Get off or teacher'll hit you." The child, startled, quickly withdrew her foot, picked up her shoe and stocking, and with a frightened look ran off down the street. I went out in front to call her back but she was out of sight. I hoped that she would come back some day, perhaps as one of a group of little first and second graders wanting to start the play and story club. We would go out to the park together and have fun, not just stepping, but rolling in the grass. Perhaps we could find, too, a dandelion to pick.

We were talking about picnics this morning as we sat on the front steps. "Teacher, what is picnics?" asked a little newcomer in the neighborhood. "I never went." "You tell her, Sophie," I said, smiling at one of our children who had been with us ever since she started kindergarten. Sophie was a veteran as far as picnics were concerned. Sophie smiled

importantly. "Oh, it's just swell. You sit on the grass and eat lots and maybe some rich peoples give you a pony ride or you go in a boat." Carmella, the newcomer, wasn't just sure she grasped the idea. She'd "never went." However, she was soon to find out through first hand experience. In the morning mail next day, there came a letter from the woman's missionary society at the Glen Ellyn Presbyterian Church, saying they would take thirty children on Wednesday of next week for a day's outing. They did hope it wouldn't rain. Glen Ellyn was twenty miles away, but our friends had thought out a plan for our transportation. We were to bring the children on the "L" to the end of the Westchester line, a ride of about an hour. At the Westchester station they would meet us with cars and take us the rest of the way. "It might be a nice ride for the children," they wrote.

I was glad we were taking the "L" instead of the street car, for on the "L" there wasn't the danger of children having to "womit." I recalled many a picnic when I had all alone ushered fifty or more little ones into a crowded street car, picnic bound. We would have been on our way no more than five minutes before a child would squeeze through from the other end of the car and attract my attention.

"Miss Florence," he would say, "Mary's got to womit. She's got to womit real bad." I would hurry down to Mary, only to be called back immediately to the other end of the car by another S.O.S. "Theresa's all white. She's got to womit too. She can't wait." I hurriedly got rags and newspapers from my bag and herded the would be "womiters" to the back platform. But if, alas, I was too late, there was always the box of sand under the side seat which we could sprinkle about generously, repairing as much as possible the damage done. Then there were the children to be wiped off. We were busy most of the way to the park.

Kindly fellow riders would look with sympathy at our little white faced passengers as they were being "wiped off" smiling bravely through it all. "I suppose the children are

not used to riding in the street car," they would say kindly.

The street car conductor was usually not so sympathetic. He generally "looked cross" when the car had to wait while I herded fifty small children inside by twos. "This here car is crowded already, lady," he would say impatiently. "Why don't you charter a special car when you have a crowd like this?" I always smiled pleasantly at him and explained that a chartered car cost \$12.00 and at six cents apiece we could make the round trip for a quarter of that price. He had to take us of course. The children's joy was checked a little by the conductor's attitude. "That conductor was mean wasn't he," they would say. "He doesn't like us. Maybe we'll get a good conductor on the next car."

For years we have dreamed of the time when we might own a station wagon so we could carry our children back and forth without annoying the public. Perhaps some day the gift will be given and our troubles on street cars will be over.

On the morning of the Glen Ellyn picnic it rained, but nothing daunted, we lined the children up in twos and made a dash through the rain to the nearest street car which would take us to the "L." We laughed as we ran. Were we not going to a picnic? Tony Scavone, aged seven, called across the street to a neighbor boy, "We're going to the country to see cows 'n elephants 'n bears."

We had passed the stage in our religious thinking where we asked God to stop the rain so we could have a picnic. We told the children the rain was needed for gardens and green grass. We could always have fun anyway, whether it rained or shone. The children were good little co-operators.

At the end of our ride we found the "rich ladies" waiting for us. "It's a shame it had to rain," they said, "but perhaps it will clear up. If it doesn't, we will have the picnic in the Church House. We have provided plenty to eat. Are you all real hungry? (turning to the children). The children nodded. "I didn't eat no breakfast," volunteered Rosie Comparetto. "I didn't neither," chimed in Vito D'Alasandro.

"My mudder said I should give my cake to my little brudder because I'd get full at the picnic." "What, *cake* for breakfast?" asked one of the ladies in shocked surprise. "Yes, cakes and coffee," I said, "and sometimes just coffee, but they are not really cakes. The children mean sugar buns or doughnuts. Besides they are stale ones purchased for five cents a dozen at the store on the corner."

That however was before we started our W.P.A. Class at the Neighborhood House bravely advertised on our bulletin board in the lobby as follows:

"Class for Mothers"

"How to Use Surplus Commodities"

"Learn how to cook nourishing food for the children."

We stopped several times along the way to let out of the cars children who needed to "womit." Our drivers were more than glad to stop when I explained the nature of the emergency. I may seem brutal but in some cases I felt the desire "to womit" was uncalled for. It gave one sort of a status to be different from the group, to be helped out of a lady's car and to be asked kindly if one felt better. After a breath of air such a child generally decided he didn't need to "womit" after all and went happily on his way.

The sun began to shine as we entered Glen Ellyn and we were able to dump our little brood out of the cars on the grassy plot in front of the church house. Such squeals of delight! The grass was a little too wet to allow rolling but the children ran and jumped and "did tricks" and patted the grass with their hands. Only Tiny and Ruby, our two new little girls, stood still in the middle of the lawn. "Run, children," I said. "You can play now. Come, catch me." I gave them a little push forward. They started a few steps in my direction and then stopped in confusion. Tiny's bloomers fell down around her feet and Ruby's shoes just would not stay on. The bit of rag that had held them in

place had fallen off in the car. A motherly woman led them into the Church House and ran across the street to her home, returning with some little garments that belonged to her own child, an underwaist with buttons and a pair of panties that would button on. The ladies had also collected quite a supply of little shoes by the time we were all called in to have lunch. The children sat around long tables and were served generously. Peter Casalette had *ten* large cups of milk and *twenty-two* sandwiches besides two helpings of spaghetti and ice cream and cake. I remember because I sat next to him and counted them. Some of the Glen Ellyn women were a little disturbed. "Are you not afraid, Miss Towne, that you will have trouble with them on the way home," they asked. "Won't they be sick?" "No," I said, "just for once let them have all the milk and bread they want. It's a new experience to have enough of anything."

About four o'clock we started for home, each child carrying a little bouquet of "live flowers" for his mother. The boys and girls lined up and sang glad good-byes to our dear friends. As the children waved their hands and sang, "We love you, we love you," I saw more than one dear missionary lady wipe away a tear.

"Gee," whispered Peter as he climbed into the car, "I wish I could come here to this church every time I get hungry."

Not a single child needed to "womit" on the way home. As we wound up Noble Street in twos on the home stretch, I heard two little girls whispering happily behind me.

"I loved the picnic. The grass was soft," said Elvira.

"I loved the picnic, too. My stomach got full," returned Carmella.

XII

THE NEIGHBORS MARCH DOWN OUR ALLEYS

OFTEN I am asked, "Do you see any signs of anarchistic tendencies among your neighbors? Is there any danger of these people starting an uprising and marching against the government?"

I invariably reply, "No, they are, most of them, too weak and hungry. They have been for so long buffeted about at the Relief Station, scolded or ignored at some of our clinics and dispensaries, and treated so generally as inferior beings they have about reached the place where they believe they *are* inferior and have accepted the label put upon them so unfairly.

"Our task is to rouse them from their apathy, to challenge them with their responsibilities and opportunities and then to stand beside them and say, "I believe in you. Together we will tackle this job and win."

I sat in our office at Erie Neighborhood House one day talking to our Ward Superintendent about the condition of our alleys. Garbage piles from both sides of the alley met in the center and were kicked about by the children playing there. Neighbors taking a short cut to their homes gingerly picked their way through the motley assortment of dead rats, tin cans, and decaying food.

In the summer under the blazing sun, the odor of wasting garbage was often so offensive it was necessary to close all the windows on the south side of the building. The garbage

sometimes lay for weeks in the alleys before it was picked up and carted away.

Our neighbors accepted this condition of affairs as a heritage which was peculiarly theirs because of their poverty and inferior station in life.

"It has always been that way," they said.

Accordingly I was talking over the whole question of garbage removal with our Ward Superintendent.

"Lady," he said, easily and almost patronizingly, "you can't do a thing with the class of people that we have in this here ward. I've tried it for years and have given up. They are ignorant and lazy and won't cooperate. Look at that now. There's a sample for you."

I looked out of the window just in time to see a neighbor on the fourth floor lean out of her window and heave her second pail of garbage into the alley where it scattered widely over the pavement beneath. It reminded me of the time when some young women had come from one of our interested churches to visit a neighborhood girl who lived down Erie Street on the third floor rear. Just as they entered the passage way between the houses "Crazy Lucy" on the third floor front opened her window and "spilled" her garbage into the passage way without noticing where it fell. The young women returned to our Neighborhood House with decorations of spaghetti and tomatoes hanging from their hats and decided they would make no more calls.

"I'll grant you that *some* of our neighbors are dirty and irresponsible," I said to the Ward Superintendent at my desk, "but they are not all that way. It is going to be our task to arouse them. We are not going to be satisfied with conditions that we *can* change if we really put our minds to it. I accept that statement you just made about our neighbors as a definite challenge."

"Wish you luck, lady," said the Ward Superintendent as he rose to go. "It's a law, of course, that the landlords must provide containers for their tenants but when the landlords

do comply with the law the boys just steal the cans. The Captain ain't goin' to send his officers out in the alleys just to watch the cans. Anyway there ain't enough policemen at the station to cover that job."

A few of our neighbors got together one evening and we drew a map of what we considered to be our immediate neighborhood, a radius of approximately four blocks in each direction with Erie Neighborhood House in the direct center. We decided we would start with even a smaller area and would concentrate first on the alleys directly to the rear and at the sides of our House. Typewritten notes were sent to all the neighbors whose homes backed up on any of these three alleys. The note invited them to a Neighborhood Rally at Erie Neighborhood House on Friday night. About sixty-five of these neighbors responded, not a very large proportion of those notified. However, we felt it was a good beginning.

Our neighbors were enthusiastic over our plans for a cleaner better neighborhood. They organized immediately, deciding to call themselves "The Neighborhood Health Club."

"Our children will all be a good deal healthier when we clean up our alleys, so that's a pretty good name for a club," declared Sophie Swiderski who had been elected secretary.

We hung the map of our neighborhood on my office door. Each neighbor selected certain blocks which he promised to supervise. He was given a certain color and the block he supervised was then outlined in that same color. At the left of the chart we kept a key to the color situation which ran something like this:

Sophie Swiderski, blue
Carmella Stangonia, pink
Peter Panorella, light brown
Dominick Savino, red

And so on down the list.

We secured oil drums which the boy scouts painted black, stenciling around the top in bold white letters "Erie Neigh-

borhood House." Over a thousand of these cans were placed up and down our alleys within the year. This was our procedure: When a member of the Club found a place where a can was needed he called in the home and had the neighbor sign a mimeographed statement to the effect that he would keep his part of the alley clean if the can was provided. The next day the can was delivered. Some of the neighbors were able to pay fifteen or twenty cents towards their container which we purchased for about twenty-five cents from the oil companies. One real estate firm that rented a large tenement on an especially neglected alley, when appealed to, sent us \$10.00 "for the good cause."

During the summer we held only a short meeting indoors and spent the rest of the time marching up and down our alleys checking on the sore spots and talking over the alley fence with those of our neighbors who were chiefly responsible for those sore spots.

Later we organized Auxiliary Clubs of our boys and girls called K. O. N. C., which is interpreted "Keep Our Neighborhood Clean." To be a member of K. O. N. C. it was necessary to promise to pick up five things a day and never under any circumstances throw anything on the ground. Over a thousand children and young people were wearing our little green and white buttons. Finally we decided to wake up the neighborhood by staging a grand parade led by the Wells High School Band.

A hundred or more banners made in Mr. Stary's craft shop bore such slogans as "Dirt must go," "Get a Garbage Can," "Erie shows the Way" and were borne aloft by our primary boys. The little girls marched along behind wearing green and white caps and capes and shouting lustily in perfect rhythm "K. O. N. C.—that means—Keep Our Neighborhood Clean." Behind them came the Health Club and odds and ends. The trucks and floats pulled up in the rear. Every once in a while the procession halted so that those behind could catch up with us. The little boys shifted their banners from

tired shoulders and joined with the little girls in our K. O. N. C. song:

"If you want to be a member of K. O. N. C.
You must keep your streets and alleys
Clean as they can be
You must pick up all the papers that you see around
And never throw a thing upon the ground."

The neighbors heard the band and gathered on the streets to watch us go proudly by, escorted by a dozen policemen from the Racine Avenue Station.

"My isn't it wonderful what they do for people in this country," exclaimed the proprietor of a Polish bakery to a customer who came in just as we marched by.

About the end of July our Ward Superintendent surprised us one morning with a visit. "Say," he said. "You folks are doing some good work. Now I just came in to tell you that we want to cooperate with you in every possible way. What can we do to help?"

"Collect the garbage twice a week instead of only once," I told him. "I was just about to write you in regard to it."

He hesitated. "Well you know," he said, "that means a lot of extra men and wagons and I haven't much help but—well anyway—I'll see what I can do—you win."

A member of the Health Club reported that a man down the street had been talking to him about the improvement in the alleys and the placing of free cans in the neighborhood.

"Our Alderman is surely doing a good job," the man down the street remarked.

"Did you think the Alderman was doing that?" asked the Health Club member indignantly. "That was done by Erie Neighborhood House and us neighbors. Erie doesn't want anything in return for its help. Erie just wants us to live clean and decent and be better neighbors."

And so the good work went on. Our theme for Vacation School that year was "Building a Better Neighborhood." On the last day of school we all went out with rakes, shovels,

brooms, waste baskets, and small express wagons, to do some practical demonstrating. There were nearly four hundred of us. The Kindergarten children chose one alley, the Primary boys and girls another and so on. Some neighbors sitting lazily along the curb with dirty papers blowing about their ankles watched us with interest.

"Say," inquired one of the men as over one hundred junior boys and girls took possession of the block, "who let out that lunatic asylum?"

"That ain't no lunatic asylum," rejoined his companion on the curb. "That's just Erie Neighborhood House cleaning up. What do you say we give them a hand?"

It is fourteen months since we organized and started marching down our alleys. We are still at work. We are finding that it takes time and endless patience. Some of the neighbors complain that the alleys are now so clean the rats are coming into the houses to look for food and jumping on the children as they sleep in bed.

Some days we are very proud of our streets and alleys and again there are times when we hang our heads in shame and wonder if the K. O. N. C.'s are slipping.

We have not yet found a way to cope with the "treasure hunters," the little old men and women who trail our alleys with burlap bags on their bent backs hunting in the garbage for a bit of hard bread or decayed fruit thrown away perhaps by a more prosperous family, or again for a bit of junk that they can sell for a few pennies. The "treasure hunters" are transients and have not yet joined the K. O. N. C.'s. They dump the contents of the cans in the alley and pass on.

Encouraging letters have come from time to time from our Ward Superintendent. He has finally enlisted the help of our Alderman and has taken hold of our problem in dead earnest. I quote from his last letter received a week ago.

"To date we have 5,100 cans in the Ward. There is a population of 69,588 persons in the ward. There are 26,000 registered voters in the ward. All this was

brought about from hard work and with your kind cooperation.

"I am attaching a letter which the Department of Streets will serve on all persons who have no containers."

All worth while accomplishments start from small beginnings. I can see a little group of neighbors opening the meeting of the Neighborhood Health Club with prayer and singing together the song which served as "the cry of our clan."

"Neighbors all, we come from here and there
We're the neighbors who will do and dare
We will show Chicago that we care
Garbage piles are on the run
And we think our job is fun
Though our task is just begun
Heigh Ho, good neighbor,
There's joy in labor,
Come join with us, There's work for everyone."

XIII

WE INVESTIGATE POLITICS

IF WE were out to make our neighborhood a better, safer, happier place for our neighbors, we realized we could not entirely disregard politics.

A large number of our neighbors who were not already citizens were hurrying to take out their papers so that they would be eligible for W. P. A. employment. Many were casting their first vote this spring. It gave one status to be a voter in our ward. The neighbor who was accustomed to being "hollered at" at the Relief station, scolded or snubbed at the over-crowded free dispensaries, and treated generally like an inferior, because of being on Relief, now on Election Day came into his own. On that day he was somebody and a very important somebody.

Our daily newspapers had played up the fact that in the better residential neighborhoods, only about fifty per cent of the registered voters took their privileges and responsibilities as citizens seriously and cast their vote at the Primaries. In wards like ours, they invariably found from eighty-five to ninety per cent of the registered voters "on the job." A politician in our ward rather shamelessly explained the reason for such a situation. "You see," he said, "Our people are all so very poor they need the money." It is a known fact that a very large percentage of our people are paid from two to six dollars for their vote.

Formerly the politicians played the game not quite as openly as they do now. On election day, Mrs. Santella, on Relief, would see a shiny black car drive up and stop at her

door. Mr. Politician, well dressed and oily of speech would inquire solicitously about her health and the welfare of her children and then tell her he had come to drive her to the polls. Poor Mrs. Santella in her shabby dress felt quite thrilled as the gentleman helped her into his car. It was so wonderful when somebody was kind to one.

After chatting pleasantly for a while, Mr. Politician would take out a sample ballot and would suggest that if Mrs. Santella had not decided on her vote, she might like to vote for his friend Koslowski, who was really a very fine man and would, if elected, do great things for the neighborhood.

As they drew up at the Polls, Mr. Politician would place a five dollar bill in Mrs. Santella's worn hand.

"Just a mite to buy the children some shoes," he would say with a most gracious smile. "No, don't thank me, don't say a word; a good woman like yourself deserves that and more. Just remember to mark your ballot for my friend, Koslowski."

Mrs. Santella walked into the Polling place with her head held high and the five dollar bill tucked safely away in her bosom. Her self-respect had risen visibly. The politicians were so kind to the poor people. Who wouldn't be glad to vote for his friend, Koslowski, especially since one had not the slightest idea who to vote for anyway. Those long ballots were so hard to understand.

Just before election, our Neighborhood Health Club, organized as I have said to clean up dirty streets and alleys and work for better housing, decided we would get results much faster if we went back a little further and stressed the importance of selecting the right sort of Alderman. The next meeting of the Health Club was turned into a political rally. The first thing we did was to show our neighbors how to mark their ballot.

"I am so glad you showed us," said a little English woman who had been a citizen for some time. "I always went to the Polls but hadn't the least idea what it all meant. I put the crosses all around in a circle, just so they looked pretty."

Another neighbor confided, "It always bothered me the way they shouted at me, 'Democrat or Republican?' I couldn't make out what they was talking about and they was always in such a hurry I couldn't ask them to explain. I just said 'Democrat' because they seemed to mention it first." (I wondered if that was why our ward went so largely democratic.)

After our talk about marking ballots, the neighbors felt a little more at home at the Polls. Several members of our mothers' clubs and one of our fathers' were chosen to act as judges of election in the various precincts. I enjoyed going from one polling place to another in our neighborhood on election day, moving in and out among our neighbors, checking on small irregularities and helping our people to feel the importance of a clean, honest vote.

At the last election everything seemed to be going smoothly as I passed in and out, but "Moose" who is on our Staff and stays all day at one precinct, had a different story to tell me. Mr. Politician no longer drives up in a shiny black car and escorts Mrs. Santella and her kind to the Polling place. She is given to understand that her money is waiting for her at the polls. Mr. Politician stands unobtrusively according to law, at a respectful distance from the Polling place. The neighbors are told to meet him there.

Sometimes there is a neighbor who believes in striking the best possible bargain. "What are you paying?" he whispers to the politician standing at the left of the Polling place. "Only three dollars, you say? Wait a minute." He saunters over to the Politician at the right and asks the same question. He sells his vote to the highest bidder, puts the money in his pocket, and walks into the polling place, a respected citizen.

At a recent election I had my first introduction to chain voting. It happened in a precinct where Minnie Potenza, a member of our mothers' club, was one of the judges of election. She was a friendly, smiling little woman, anxious to please as it was her first time behind the table. She knew the

judge must mark each ballot with her initial and that she must look for the initial on the folded ballot before placing it in the ballot box, but something slipped someway. A voter came out of the booth and placed his ballot in the box before she could challenge him. The ballot was one already marked by "Mr. Politician," and given our voter as he entered the polling place. The ballot which had been given by the judge of election and marked with her initials was carried out of the polling place for "Mr. Politician" to mark up for the next member of the chain. Chain voting, once started, can go on like this all day.

After our last election we wrote a personal letter to everyone in the precinct whom we knew had cast an honest vote, commending him on his action, and urging him to stand with us in our efforts to educate our neighbors to higher ideals of citizenship. It is slow work breaking any established pattern in our neighborhood. It is even more difficult to convince our neighbors when money is involved, money which is needed for the necessities of life these days when so many are on Relief. However, we still continue in our efforts for cleaner politics for we believe in attempting "the impossible," when we are working for God.

XIV

OUR YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE A DECISION

IT STARED up at us from a sheet of the bi-weekly news letter sent out from the Council of Social Agencies—

“For Sale—Log cabin on Lake Michigan, 15 miles east of Gary. Screened-in porch. 100 feet from the beach. Price—\$350.00.”

We had often dreamed of a camp of our own, not a real camp, perhaps, but a cabin or cottage in the woods or beside the lake where we could take ten or twelve children or young people at a time and live with them in God’s Out-of-doors. There was, of course, Camp Gray, but with limited funds and also a limited quota, we were able to send not more than forty carefully selected children throughout the summer. In addition there were some young people, older boys and girls, with definite behavior problems, who were not ready yet for the carefully set up conference program which was enjoyed by many of our young people who had grown up at Erie Neighborhood House. This group, too, needed to get a breath of God’s Out-of-doors into their souls and a knowledge of His love into their hearts. Quiet talks beside the lake might help them to find Him.

It was a continual struggle to raise our maintenance budget each month. How, then, could we possibly secure the funds with which to purchase a camp? However, per-

haps this was God's leading. We would at least go and look at the cabin. It was so near Chicago. The expense of transportation would be reduced to a minimum.

Accordingly early one morning three of our staff went out in Lew's car to look at the cabin. (Lew was the new boys' worker who had just come to take Dick's place.) We followed carefully the directions as set forth in the Council's news letter. Reaching Wilson Avenue station on the South Shore electric, we could then take a sand wagon that for twenty-five cents would deposit us at the beach a mile distant. However, we preferred to walk. Stopping first to get the key from the caretaker, we crawled under four rows of freight cars and followed the trail through the woods. Great clumps of pussy willow grew along the path. The sun shone gloriously on our backs. We soon found ourselves carrying our coats and also our shoes and stockings as we left the trail through the woods and began climbing the sand dunes. Over the top of the last sand dune we caught our first view of Lake Michigan.

A few yards further on we found our log cabin. We already called it "ours." It was old but still in good condition. There was a small upper story housing two double beds. At least four could sleep up there. Then there were two rooms below and a screened-in porch. There was water in the house and quite near to our cabin we discovered a small store which would be convenient since we were doing our own cooking.

We sat down in the sand in front of our log cabin and figured it all out. We already owned twelve folding cots. These would do for a while. Perhaps later we could get some double deckers and so leave some floor space beside the beds for a living room in case of rain.

We felt sure our interested churches would help us with old comforts or blankets, and perhaps some odds and ends of dishes. A feather tick had come in with the old clothes just the other day. We could ask the "Looking Up Mothers"

to help us make it into pillows. The "Looking Up Mothers" were always asking for some work to do for Erie.

Then there was that bolt of red checked gingham left over from our sewing classes. It would make gay little ruffled curtains for all the windows.

We trudged back through the sand and crawled under the freight cars again with a decided thrill. Perhaps this was God's answer to our prayers. Everything seemed more than favorable. We called up the owner on our return to the city to ask some further questions. He told us that if we decided to purchase the cabin before May first we could have it for three hundred dollars. The place belonged to his sister and she was moving to California and so was anxious to sell as soon as possible.

We were so full of plans it was hard to keep them to ourselves, so we began to talk it over with some of our young people who made up sort of an inner circle, Patsy, Jack, Rose, Carmella, and some of the others. Patsy's story is told elsewhere in this book. John, Rose and Carmella had all three grown up at Erie Neighborhood House, starting in the Kindergarten. I had met Jack's father in the street one day and stopped to talk with him. It was one of the few times during the fifteen years he had lived in the neighborhood that I had ever seen him absolutely entirely sober.

"You have a fine boy in Jack," I told him. "He is a great leader among our young people. You know he has taken over the Boy Scouts and is also teaching a class in our Sunday School. You must be very proud of him."

"Yes, Jack's all right. He's a good boy," returned his father, "but the credit doesn't belong to me. (He never spoke truer words.) I never could have raised him up in this here neighborhood if it hadn't been for Erie Neighborhood House. Jack calls Erie his second home."

Jack was most enthusiastic about our log cabin. His eyes just shone. "We'll find some way," he said.

The next day the owner of the cabin called us to say that

as time was passing rapidly and his sister must soon start for California he would let us have the place for \$250.00, if we were still interested. Jack came in that evening, all excited. "I've got it," he cried, "the Ada Street Athletes will buy the cabin for us. I've been talking to the president, Bill LaRocco. Some of his gang are going out to look it over early tomorrow morning."

The news spread among the young people like wild-fire. The Ada Street Athletes had fixed up a club room just next door to the Neighborhood House. They had invited Lew and myself over there at Christmas time for their house warming. They had invited their parents too, and one or two of the boys had brought their "girl friends." The boys had provided a fancy whipped cream cake and had made some coffee. We had loaned our tables, chairs, silver and dishes for the occasion.

After the refreshments as we settled back comfortably in our chairs, Bill got up and made a speech. Bill had served several years "in the pen." He had been out now about a year and was not only going straight but had been responsible for organizing this new club, the Ada Street Athletes, which he hoped would help all the boys go straight. Five of the Ada Street Athletes had spent some time in jail. I have a copy of Bill's speech in the drawer of my desk, but here it is considerably condensed.

"Erie Neighborhood House has done a lot for this community. It is time that some of us fellows were taking hold and helping them carry the load. That's just what the Ada Street Athletes aim to do. We are quite a new club and haven't made a lot of plans yet but we are thinking of throwing a dance in the near future so we can raise some money and do something for the neighborhood. We thought we might give out a lot of baskets to the poor kids at Christmas, or something like that. We all want you to know, Miss Florence, that you can count on us."

Bill sat down amid a storm of applause. "Bill's all right,"

OUR YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE A DECISION 75

whispered Lew across the table. I felt rather "thrilly" myself.

The club went along nicely. In March Bill came in to see me, about the dance. "It is going to be a big affair," he said. "We are having it at the Dreamy River ballroom. We hope to make a lot of money and we are all out now getting advertisements for our program book. We thought if you'd write us a letter on Erie stationery to show to our prospective advertisers, it might help a lot, just saying Erie sponsors us, you know, and all that."

"Of course I will," I said, and then I hesitated. "I'll have to ask you, Billy, are you going to sell drinks at your dance—I mean beer and whiskey?"

"Sure," answered Billy. "We got to. Nobody will come to a dance where they don't sell drinks. Besides that's where we make most of our money."

"Why not be different, Billy?" I urged. "Leave drink out. Show the young people you can have a better time without it. I am interested in your club, Billy, but I couldn't write you a letter, you know, if you are selling drinks. At Erie we are fighting alcohol with every bit of energy we have. It is a great destructive force in our neighborhood. Look at the Schonowskis on our street. That's an example of what alcohol does to folks."

The president of the Ada Street Athletes looked dubious. "I'd like to please you, Miss Florence," he said, "but I know I couldn't get the boys to agree. You see we are figuring on making a lot of money on this dance and that's where you make your money—on the drinks. Thanks just the same."

The dance was held. It was a great success, at least from a worldly point of view. The boys made between six and seven hundred dollars. The Ada Street Athletes were planning to redecorate and refurnish their club rooms with some of the money but they hadn't decided what to do with the rest of their funds. There were the "Christmas baskets for the poor kids," of course, but Christmas was all of eight months away.

And now Jack had come in with the news that the Ada Street Athletes would buy the log cabin and turn it over to Erie Neighborhood House. I was elated. Here was a prayer of many years answered—and by whom? by a group of boys who had grown up in our neighborhood, who had gotten into trouble and were now going straight, boys who were grateful for all that Erie Neighborhood House meant in the Community and wanted to express their appreciation in some practical way. This would make an excellent story to tell at the next meeting of our Board of Directors.

For just one day excitement ran high among our "inner circle" of young people. Then, suddenly the thought came to me (why had I not thought of this at first?), the Ada Street Athletes had admitted themselves that they had made most of their money selling drinks. Could we accept this money for our camp? The answer in my mind was very definitely "No."

At 10:30 that night after the evening activities were over and the front door locked, Jack, Patsy, Rose and Carmella gathered in the office with two of our staff members and myself to talk the matter over. I told them what was on my mind.

A shadow fell across Jack's face. "You're right," he said, "but—" Then began the discussion that lasted way after midnight.

One of our newer staff members said he realized the club had made a mistake in selling drinks but after all, now that they had this money, wouldn't it be better to have them spend it on something that would bring a lot of happiness to our children and young people. Then again, what effect would it have on the Ada Street Athletes if we should refuse their gift? They were really running a good club.

Perhaps our standards were too high right at the first, suggested another. After all, there were some people in our supporting churches who served cocktails occasionally. And so we talked it over back and forth.

OUR YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE A DECISION 77

Suddenly the old light came back into Jack's face. "It's all decided," he said. "We are not taking it. If it's right we'll get the money someway. If not, we can go without it. We don't need it that much. No, sir, we can wait. Let's stick for Erie's ideals."

A great gladness stirred in my heart. "Jack," I said, as I felt sudden tears fill my eyes, "if some one placed \$250.00 in my hand tomorrow, I would not rejoice as much as I do right now. I would rather have that spirit in the hearts of our young people than anything anyone could give us. I'm proud that at Erie Neighborhood House we have young people who can decide for the right and stand by their decisions, even when it's difficult to do so."

"I'll slip by," said Jack, "And tell Billy we thank him but we can't do it. Goodnight all."

"It was great, wasn't it?" said Lew, as we walked upstairs together after the young people had gone. "I knew how badly Jack wanted to get that cabin. He was crazy about it." I found the lines of John Oxenham's verse singing themselves in my heart.

"To every man their openeth
A Way and Ways and a Way
And the High Soul climbs the High Way
And the Low Soul gropes the Low
And in between in the misty flats
The rest drift to and fro—
But to every man there openeth
A High Way and a Low
And every man decideth
The Way his soul shall go."*

"Father in Heaven," I prayed, "It is a great trust that Thou hast given to us, that of leading these young people up towards the Heights. Forgive us. We almost failed Thee. We shall set as our goal not some half way mark but rather lift

* From "*Bees in Amber*." Reprinted by permission of the American Tract Society.

up our eyes towards the very top of our shining mountain as we press forward. It will be a joyous climb because we shall take it together and with Thee. The way up will not be easy but out of the stress of our toiling shall arise new neighbors, strong, confident, unafraid, and so in time a new neighborhood."

XV

THE PERFECT GIFT

IT WAS a Sunday morning early in December. In the Junior Department of a North Shore Sunday School, eighty or more boys and girls sat and listened as I told them stories of our Erie neighbors, stories of children who had no light or warmth in their homes and not enough food. Finally I told them the story of the three dolls that I had discovered one day while visiting in the neighborhood—the milk bottle dolly, the stick of kindling wood, and the doll that had no head or arms or legs but a “stomach just.”

The children before me were warmly and tastefully dressed. They would be going home soon to a very special Sunday dinner. Perhaps in the afternoon they would go for a ride in the car, or curl up comfortably on the couch in a warm cheerful living room and listen to the radio. How could these boys and girls understand that multitudes of children of their own age right here in Chicago were cold and hungry and insecure.

As I sat down at the close of the talk, the superintendent rose to his feet. He had been visibly moved by the stories of need. He brought forth a clean white linen handkerchief and blew his nose somewhat vigorously.

“I have been thinking while our speaker was talking,” he said to the children. “You all know that Christmas is coming. All you children have a number of broken toys lying around under foot, toys that you do not care for any more. Mother and Daddy will be getting you a lot of new things for Christmas. How many of you boys and girls would like

to get together all these old broken toys for which you have no further use and bring them to the church on Saturday afternoon. I will see that they get down to Erie Neighborhood House."

A sea of hands were lifted up into the air. The superintendent was much pleased.

"That's fine," he said. "Remember children you will be getting so many nice new things at Christmas that you will never miss the old toys that you give away. It will be fine to know that your gifts are making the little children at Erie Neighborhood House happy. Miss Towne here (nodding in my direction) will be glad, I am sure, for just anything we have to send."

I was glad if it is possible for one to be glad and sad at the same time. The things that these North Shore children did not want would make a happy Christmas for our children at Erie. How many times we had used the things that people did not want to bring comfort and joy in our neighborhood. Men's worn shirts, ragged at the neck band, were made into aprons and dresses for our two-year-olds. The crusts of bread cut from party sandwiches made many a bread pudding for hungry people. The dandelions that people dug out of their lawns and threw into the gutter called forth shouts of joy from our little Polish and Italian children who "just loved live flowers" and would touch them gently, asking "Are they real?"

We could always use the things that people did not want but—was this the gift to bring to Him at Christmas tide, He who gladly gave all for us? Were we teaching our children to lay at His feet *only* the things that they did not care for, assuring them at the same time that they would not suffer from the giving? Was this the spirit of the early Christians? Would the church ever move outward and upward gloriously and triumphantly as long as His people were satisfied to give in this way?

I went back to our neighborhood longing for a John Huss,

a David Livingstone, or an Adoniram Judson to stir us to a new interpretation of Christianity. Everywhere the windows were gay with Christmas decorations. There was a holiday spirit abroad in the air. Warmly dressed little children were being led into our large department stores by the dozens these days and urged by fond relatives to tell Santa Claus what they wanted for Christmas. Oh, if only some Santa Claus wiser than the rest had whispered this question into some child's ear—"What are you *giving* this Christmas? It is Jesus' birthday you know, not yours. What plans have you made to make *Him* happy?"

The following week I had promised to speak at the Woman's Society in Greenville. The Greenville Community Church ministered to a farming community. It was extremely difficult for these farmers' wives to realize that there were so many hungry people in the city. "Why here all fall," declared the minister's wife, "fruit just lay rotting on the ground and we fed it to the hogs." It was also difficult for these people in Greenville to realize that there were children in our Kindergarten who had never felt the grass soft under their feet and longed to pick just one dandelion. It was even harder for them to believe that there were hundreds of people in Chicago who had never heard the story of Jesus and had never seen a copy of the Holy Book.

At the close of the meeting as refreshments were being served, one of the women came up to speak to me. She was holding something in her hand wrapped in her handkerchief. There were tears in her eyes.

"I want to tell you a story," she said, "if you can spare a few minutes. It's about myself. We live on a farm just west of here. Farmers have had a rather hard time these last few years. Oh, we haven't been hungry like your people. There has been plenty to eat, but we haven't had much ready cash. I have two boys in High School. The elder one graduates in June. We've worked pretty hard these last years to do what was necessary on the farm and keep the boys in

school. About a month ago, I think it was, father said to me, 'Mother, I don't believe you have had a new dress for eight years. You must get one for Christmas.' I laughed at him. 'We haven't any money for new dresses' I said. 'There is the boys' dental work to be done and we need some new feed for the chickens. I can do very well with what I have.' Then the boys chimed in. 'Mother, do get a new dress, something with red around the neck. Red makes you look so pretty. You haven't been dressed up for a long time.' And so father and the boys kept at me all evening trying to show me that it was every woman's duty to dress up for her men folks, that I owed it to them and to myself. Well, finally I gave in and said I would save the egg money until Christmas and get the dress. The boys picked out one at the Emporium, our general store. It was sort of a soft, dark blue with red trimming at the neck and around the cuffs, priced at just \$4.98. I was to stop by for it after the woman's meeting today. I had just the right amount saved from the egg money. See, it is all here in quarters." The woman opened her handkerchief and held it out for me to see. "Perhaps you will think it is strange," she continued, "but while you were talking I made up my mind. I don't want that dress now. I couldn't buy it after I heard you tell those stories. Will you take this money—all of it—and carry it back to Erie Neighborhood House to help the people there? Tell them it's from a woman who loves the Lord Jesus Christ and knows that He loves them, too. I'd like to make this my Christmas gift to Him."

Even though the need was great at Erie, I felt this was a gift that I could not accept. I wanted to say to the dear lady beside me, "Thank you but you must not give this money even though it is yours to give. God does not expect us to go to this extreme in our giving. He asks us only to share. I believe God wants you to have that pretty blue and red dress. Father and the boys are right. It is every woman's duty to keep herself looking fresh and pretty for her family."

However, as I looked up at her to say these words, I saw that she was not looking my way. She was looking afar off—somewhere beyond me, perhaps, into the face of Him whom she loved and so truly served. Her face at that moment was radiant, one of the most beautiful faces I have ever seen. Standing before her I felt very inadequate and unworthy. I realized I could not refuse this gift for she was not giving it to me but rather to Him who gave His life for her. I took the silver from her handkerchief reverently, and tucked it away down in one corner of my purse. The place where it lay against the lining of my bag seemed almost a holy spot. Back at Erie Neighborhood House, I used the gift bit by bit to bring comfort and hope and joy to those who had greatest need. With every gift I told the story of this woman's love.

I could not help wondering what father and the boys said when mother came home without the dress or the money with which to purchase it.

When the Christian world is challenged to such giving and accepts the challenge, there will be no children crying for bread, no young people bitter and disillusioned, grown old before their time, and no men and women crying out "There is no God."

XVI

THE NEIGHBORS SHARE

DO YOU really think that the neighbors appreciate the things you are doing for them?" This is a question that is sometimes asked by our friends and contributors. Perhaps we may let the neighbors speak for themselves.

It is Christmas Sunday. The only light in our neighborhood church comes from twenty-four white candles fastened in the long narrow windows on each side of the room. In front, seated beside the altar is Rose, one of our Italian girls who is taking the part of the Virgin Mary. She is lovely with the soft white draperies about her face and shoulders, as she looks down tenderly at the little child in the manger. Rose has grown up at the Neighborhood House, having started first in the kindergarten. She is now a teacher in our Sunday School. On either side of the altar where the neighbors will place their gifts, are two tall white candles. Softly the organ begins to play, "O Come All Ye Faithful," and our church members start down the aisle. There is Mrs. Santella who was evicted last week and stayed with her four children one night at the Neighborhood House. Behind her is Carmella Spatuzza whose baby did not die because we somehow managed to get a stove into the house. Following her next in the aisle is Joe Gardella. Joe formerly was the neighborhood drunkard. His wife was on the verge of leaving him but she brought him to Erie Neighborhood House and we helped him find God. That was four years ago. He is one of our deacons now.

So row by row they file down to the front and pause a moment beside the manger filled with light as they lay their

gifts upon the altar. Now the music is changing. Herman is playing, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The neighbors join with the choir, singing softly as they come,

"Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us today."

Joe Pilcarzski is just bringing his gift. He is struggling to break away from drink, and is finding help in the men's club that meets on Tuesday evenings. Next in line is Angelina with her two weeks old baby wrapped in a pink blanket in her arms. The Infants' Benefit League from one of our churches furnished the layette that made it possible for Angelina to bring her baby to church on Christmas Sunday. Some of the neighbors are placing on the altar small white envelopes holding their gifts. Others are bringing folded slips of white paper on which is written a pledge of service.

Ninety per cent of these neighbors are on Relief or supported by very inadequate W.P.A. wages. If one is on Relief, it means there is not enough to eat, not enough for rent or fuel, and nothing for light, medicine or clothing.

Now the service is over and the gifts upon the altar are counted. There is a total of \$68.88. In an envelope marked with Joe Funelli's name there is a dollar bill. Joe is an old man whose wife died a year ago. He lives alone, receiving \$9.80 each month from the Relief Station. Joe has been without a fire in his stove now for over a week, yet he has left \$1.00 on the altar for Erie.

The white slips, too, tell of service gladly offered in His name. Mrs. Kachadorian, our Armenian neighbor, will be glad to wash all of Erie's curtains whenever they are dirty. Mrs. Pelczarki, already overworked in her own home and going each week to the dispensary for help, writes she will come to wash dishes whenever we need her, perhaps at the next meeting of our Board of Directors or Auxiliary luncheon.

And here is a slip unsigned, written in rather cramped style, as if the writer was unused to expressing himself on paper.

"Our love and thanks to God (who) gave us Erie."

Rise up, Oh men of God,
Have done with lesser things
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
To serve the King of kings.

Rise up, Oh men of God,
His kingdom tarries long
Bring in the day of brotherhood
And end the night of wrong.

REV. W. P. MERRILL

631

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



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"Erie Neighborhood House through long years of devoted service has proven itself an able instrument in the hand of our church for making Christ known to and loved by a great company of people who without it would never know that God is a God of infinite compassion."

DR. HENRY S. BROWN,
*Former Superintendent of
Presbyterian Church Extension Board*

"Erie Neighborhood House has demonstrated in a very remarkable way, through the years, the spirit of service and love of Christ."

DR. JOHN TIMOTHY STONE,
*President-Emeritus
Presbyterian Theological Seminary
of Chicago*

"The work carried on at Erie Neighborhood House discredits and undermines disbelief as effectively as casual and careless living undermines and discredits belief. A visit to Erie Neighborhood House is well worth a trip from either coast. It is a thrilling continuation of "all that Jesus began to teach and to do."

DR. EMORY W. LUCCOCK,
*Minister, First Presbyterian Church
of Evanston*

"I have been deeply interested in the work at Erie Neighborhood House for nearly twenty years and am highly gratified with the results therefrom. It should be liberally supported."

Frank J. Loesch,
*Former President of the
Chicago Crime Commission*

"Gladly do I offer a word of praise and thanksgiving for the existence of the Erie Neighborhood House. It is a center of rest and comfort to all who are lonely or in trouble for there they seek wise counsel, sympathy and cooperative helpfulness. It is a center of cheer and strength for young men and young women who value a word of guidance in their search for a pathway in life. It is a center of uplift and inspiration for all who have learned to know the Lord Jesus Christ."

HENRY P. CROWELL,
*Chairman, Board of Directors
The Quaker Oats Company*